

Continuity and Change
Rural Poland 1918-2018
Searching for Sources
of the Present

Maria Halamska

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Translated by
Joanna Dutkiewicz

Warsaw 2020

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1918
CONTINUITY AND CHANGE
2018

Original edition: *Ciągłość i zmiana. Wieś polska 1918–2018.*
W poszukiwaniu źródeł teraźniejszości (2020)

Reviewers: Professor Marie-Claude Maurel, Professor Roch Sulima

Proofreading: David Westacott, Karolina Podlipna

Cover design: Frycz & Wicha

The cover photo by Małgorzata Wójtowicz-Cichoń, *Pasieka in Spring*, shows the vicinity of the author's family home

Publication financed under the programme of the Minister of Science and Higher Education – „DIALOG” in the years 2017–2019

The partner in the project is the Central Statistical Office

The publication was supported by the European Fund for the Development of Polish Villages Foundation and the Rural Development Foundation

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ISBN 978-83-66470-55-2

doi 10.7366/9788366470552

Publisher

Institute of Rural and Agricultural Development
Polish Academy of Sciences
Nowy Świat St. 72, 00-330 Warsaw
www.irwirpan.waw.pl

Partner

Scholar Publishing House Ltd.
Oboźna St. 1, 00-340 Warsaw
tel. 22 692 41 18; 22 826 59 21; 22 828 93 91
e-mail: info@scholar.com.pl
www.scholar.com.pl

First edition

Typeset: WN Scholar (Jerzy Łazarski)
Printed by: Totem, Inowrocław



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This book owes a lot to my colleagues from the Institute of Rural and Agricultural Development of the Polish Academy of Sciences, who found the time to read it and kindly shared their remarks with me: Basia Perepeczko, Monika Stanny and Dominika Zwęglińska-Gałęcka, Sławek Kalinowski, Andrzej Rosner and Jurek Wilkin, and also my great friend Ela Piotrowska. Special thanks go to my eminent colleague Krzysztof Gorlach from the Jagiellonian University for his many remarks and comments on the manuscript of the volume. A separate thank you is due to the reviewers: Prof. Marie-Claude Maurel from the École des hautes études en sciences sociales in Paris and Prof. Roch Sulima from the University of Warsaw. Thank you also to Joanna Dutkiewicz, who translated the publication into English.

INTRODUCTION

For long centuries, the social function of history was to provide historical legitimacy for certain phenomena of the present and for rights in the future (Witold Kula, *Historia, zacofanie, rozwój* [History, Backwardness, Development], 1983)

1. The aim of the monograph and its origins

The past 100 years in Poland has been a fascinating time of changes in all areas of life, including fundamental system transformations. Rural areas and agriculture have played a very important role in these changes. This monograph presents the author's original synthesis of analyses carried out by many researchers as part of the interdisciplinary project *Continuity and Change: One Hundred Years of Polish Countryside and Agriculture Development – Interdisciplinary Cooperation of Humanities and Social Sciences for Academic Dialogue*. The aim of this project was to provide a multifaceted description of the processes forming the picture of the countryside's changing role in Poland's economic, social and cultural life in the 100 years since the country regained its independence, i.e. in the years 1918–2018. The several dozen studies produced in the project revealed the significance of one especially important – and numerically the biggest – actor of Polish history over the past century: the rural population, and, within it, the peasant population that was predominant for over half the period under analysis. Their contribution to Poland's development deserves proper appreciation.

The project was carried out at the Institute of Rural and Agricultural Development of the Polish Academy of Sciences in 2016–2020. Those working on the project were, first and foremost, employees of the institute, but the collaborators included many leading scholars from other academic communities. Their work has resulted in several dozen studies published in three volumes of the collective monograph *Ciągłość i zmiana: Sto lat rozwoju polskiej wsi* [Continuity and Change: One Hundred Years of Polish Rural Development]. Those studies have been the main source material for the present synthesis; this multifaceted monograph could not have been produced without them. That is why the authors are given a voice many times in the text – to underline their contribution to this analysis, although it draws upon many other sources as well.

During work on the present volume, one more, additional source emerged: my own memory. Describing the processes taking place in rural Poland over the past century, I realised that I had observed many of them in person or listened to the accounts of direct witnesses to certain events. One of the first such remembered instances was Stalin's death. A neighbour came to our house and asked my father: "So what happens now?" Today I cannot say, however, if the question expressed concern or hope. And this imperfect memory of mine has sometimes intervened in some of the descriptions or analyses.

2. The 19th century in the history of rural Poland, or the foundation of the present

The 19th century was of key importance for the whole of Europe: the industrial revolution was spreading, albeit at different rates, fundamentally changing the economies and social structures of successive countries. Poland was absent from the map of Europe throughout the 19th century, as in the second half of the 18th century – following three consecutive partitions from 1772 to 1795 – its territories had been appropriated by the neighbouring powers: Russia, Prussia and Austria-Hungary. The agrarian system in Polish lands was feudal in character all the way to the mid-19th century:

...it was based on divided ownership of land coupled with the principle of separation of the social estates and the peasantry's personal and judicial subjection to landowners. As for ownership, one can speak of the following types: government (state), private manorial (gentry) and church. There was also independent peasant ownership, comprising former village-leader and royal-peasant farms, chiefly within state lands. Field work on manor or state farms was carried out by peasant families (who simultaneously ran their own farms as users) and hired manor workers. Since the land used by peasant farms was not legally owned by the peasants (divided ownership, or emphyteusis), peasants were obligated to make payments (levies) that assumed two forms in the 19th century: money (rent) and labour (feudal service). The amount required depended on the size of a peasant's farm, and in the case of feudal service was counted in the number of work days a peasant had to spend on manorial land (Leszczyńska 2018, p. 17).

This lay at the foundation of all the principles for the functioning of the agrarian system – manor farms, peasant farms and their mutual relations. A debate on the need to change agrarian relations in Poland began in the late

18th century, but it was only the granting of freehold – conducted by the partitioning powers in different periods and according to different rules – that led to actual change.

Different rules of granting freehold, different legal systems and different levels of economic development in the partitions meant different rates of change in the agrarian structure, and consequently also in rural areas. The changes – as Cecylia Leszczyńska points out – went in different directions, but always led to a dichotomous farm structure: a small number of large landowner farms used about half the land, and a huge number of small land ownership (peasant) farms – up to 95% of the community – cultivated the rest. Due to demographic pressure and the resultant division of property, the number of peasant farms kept growing.

Table 1.

The abolition of serfdom and feudal service in Polish lands in the 19th century and its consequences for land ownership structure

	Prussian partition	Russian partition		Austrian partition (Galicia)
		Kingdom of Poland	Western provinces	
Serfdom	1807–1811	1807	1861–1863	1848
Granting of land freehold	1811–1858	1864		
Land ownership (arable land, wasteland, forests) in % in the early 20th century				
– peasant	42.5	48.7	n/a	65.7
– large landowner	57.5	41.2	n/a	34.3
– other	0.0	10.1	n/a	0.0

Source: own work based on Leszczyńska 2018, pp. 19, 39.

The 19th-century reforms – the abolition of serfdom and feudal service – marked the beginning of modernity: they heralded a different rural economy invoking market mechanisms and formed the basis for the citizenisation of peasants, although the path to full emancipation of this social class was still very long. They also caused the awareness of not just peasants but the whole of society to change. This process of shedding the features of serfdom has not ended yet, as indicated in recent studies: that by Janusz Hryniewicz (2004) on the manor-farm management culture¹ in today's companies and

¹ "A manor-farm organisational culture led to the consolidation of two different types of behaviour of manor-farm employees and managers. On the owner/manager side we had a fulness of unhampered power and awareness of absolute decision-making discretion; on the peasant side there developed

administration; those exposing the role of legends and mythology in Polish people's social life, which reduces the capacity for rational decision-making (Podgórecki 1995); on the impact of backwardness caused by peripherality on the development of social agency (Sowa 2011), leading to the denial of responsibility for the real course of events, as described by Andrzej Leder (2014). All of these studies challenge previous narratives and revisit repressed traumatic historical events such as serfdom, the annihilation of the Jews and the people's revolution that swept away the landed gentry.² These studies (and many others) question the existing historical narrative, seeking an explanation for Polish problems "with modern form"³ not only in the communist period of People's Poland but in the much more distant past of Polish rural areas, i.e. the times of feudal service and peasant serfdom.

3. The "longue durée" and ways of analysing it

Analysing changes in rural Poland over a century also required referencing the more distant past and making certain methodological assumptions. The main one was that social reality undergoes continuous, sometimes faster and sometimes slower change. It was obvious that we were interested not so much in particular social changes, i.e. "the difference between the social system's state at one moment in time and the same system's state at another moment in time", but directional social processes, i.e. series of changes, "sequences of system changes, one following another and causally conditioned" (Sztompka 2003, pp. 437–438). This was the assumption of the processual nature of society.

Secondly, there was the assumption of dynamic change. A hundred years, a whole century, is a period long enough to make many changes noticeable, even very slow ones and even those that form the essence of Braudel's "longue

an ethos of forced and internalised obedience combined with the lack of a sense of responsibility and the need for detailed instructions at work as well as the manager's care outside the work environment" (Hryniewicz 2004, p. 208 et seq.).

² "As stated earlier, in any analysis of the place of rural areas and peasants in the symbolic social imaginary of Polish people, it is important to take a closer look at the social determinants of that discourse, as reflected in works from the last decade, including Jan Sowa's *Fantomowe ciało króla: peryferyjne zmagania z nowoczesną formą* [The King's Phantom Body: A Peripheral Struggle with Modern Form] (Sowa 2011), Marcin Zaremba's *Wielka Trwoga. Polska 1944–1947. Ludowa reakcja na kryzys* [The Great Fear: Poland 1944–1947: The Peasant Response to the Crisis] (Zaremba 2012) and Andrzej Leder's *Prześliona rewolucja. Ćwiczenia z logiki historycznej* [Sleepwalking Through the Revolution: An Exercise in Historical Logic] (Leder 2014)" (Sulima 2020, in press).

³ I refer to the title of the book by Jan Sowa (2011), *Fantomowe ciało króla. Peryferyjne zmagania z nowoczesną formą* [The King's Phantom Body: A Peripheral Struggle with Modern Form].

durée” (English: long term). Rural reality has many such seemingly lasting elements, but:

it is always a course of something that is happening, that undergoes change, even if small, often imperceptible, seemingly unimportant. It is only a long course of such small changes that one day, at some hour, shows that they had their significance, that they brought change, noticeable and perceptible. Which absolutely does not mean that great changes only take place through the accumulation of small changes and never occur by means of sudden and violent processes, too (Rybicki 1979, p. 546).

Over the past century, several such violent changes occurred, serving as turning points on the 100-year time axis. Among them was the German-Soviet occupation of 1939–1945, which claimed the lives of millions of Polish citizens, including rural residents; the territorial changes following World War II, with the accompanying displacement and relocation of the population; the socio-political and economic revolutions begun in 1944, and those begun in 1989. These events caused fundamental and most significant changes: changes of direction and changes of the political and institutional system. These were “changes that involved the relations between social classes or otherwise distinguished segments of the great community, and the relations between the governing and the governed, but they defined a change of the entire form of collective life” (ibid., p. 559).

The consequence of this was the adoption of the historical (comparative historical) method⁴ as the main approach. It is:

a form of research that consists in presenting phenomena in time, i.e. in the process of becoming. ... The comparative historical method is used when explaining the occurrence of changes undergone by different institutions, social relations, social groups, processes or other types of social facts in their historical course all the way to the contemporary state (Turowski 1992, p. 55).

Its application in the social sciences is different than in history itself. The social sciences do not reconstruct what happened in the past (that is history's task) but – based on the knowledge gathered by historians – strive for: “a theory of a phenomenon on its specific, historical example. ... Aiming to extract

⁴ The classics of this method are considered to include Karl Marx, Max Weber and Alexis de Tocqueville. In research on rural Poland, it was used by Władysław Grabski, Józef Burszta, Kazimiera Zawistowicz-Adamska, Stefan Czarnowski and Kazimierz Dobrowolski.

'generality' from a specific case and using comparative analysis of the states of a given phenomenon in different temporal cross-sections, all the way to the current state, is the *signum specificum* of the comparative method" (ibid., p. 56). The comparative historical method has many variations, but the research strategies are always a combination of elements of deduction and induction (Cymbrowski 2015, p. 72). The variations often depend on the period when the method was applied. The second wave of its popularity⁵ in the 1970s and 1980s yielded analyses that had a major impact on the perception of social change. Not only Immanuel Wallerstein's monograph *The Modern World-System* (1974), but also other studies introduced space into analyses: the world centre and peripheries, the relationships existing between them, and their distinctive development. The latest analyses place strong emphasis on human agency and subjectivity.⁶ Such historical subjectivity-focused approaches include the concept/model of "the becoming of society", which combines the historical factor⁷ with the subjective factor.⁸ The becoming of society is "a process of constant producing, reproducing and modification of social reality ... through contextually and structurally determined actions of individuals and communities" (Sztompka 2003, p. 538). The becoming of society was the methodological framework bringing together the interdisciplinary team involved in the project.

Analysing a complex social phenomenon like the countryside requires looking at rural areas from many sides, analysing many of their features. The project's third assumption was that of the interdisciplinarity of the analysis. Research based on this approach takes advantage of the achievements of different scientific disciplines, integrating those achievements and revealing new facets of a social phenomenon. "The need for interdisciplinarity is the social effect of such a narrowly specialised scientific order, it is an attempt to move beyond the curse of expertise" (Wróbel 2014, p. 16). The team working on the project represented many scientific disciplines. Each specialist in a given field analysed their particular theme of change according to the canons of the comparative historical method. Each of them, however, was aware

⁵ Julia Adams, Elisabeth S. Clemens and Ann Shola Orloff (2004) distinguished three waves in the development of historical sociology: from the late 19th century to the 1950s; the 1970s and 1980s; and the third wave from the 1990s to the present day. Cited from Cymbrowski 2015.

⁶ This trend includes the above-cited analyses by Hryniewicz, Leder, Sowa and many others (Kolasa-Nowak 2015).

⁷ Historical factor: placing every event or phenomenon within the historical sequence of preceding and following events, which requires that the temporal aspect be considered in every social study (Sztompka 2003, p. 538).

⁸ Subjectivity factor: perceiving every social event or phenomenon as the effect of human activity, making it necessary to reveal the acting subject in every social study (ibid.).

of the limitations of their particular analysis and, at the same time, of its complementariness in relation to the others. This was ensured by the way the project was run: as it progressed, several dozen working seminars were held; these not only integrated the team but also maintained it in a state of “interdisciplinary tension”. The present monograph, while showing the features of rural areas and processes of their evolution, also aims to highlight the merits of interdisciplinarity, which has been practised at the Institute of Rural and Agricultural Development of the Polish Academy of Sciences for almost 50 years. In this publication I take advantage of these multidisciplinary achievements, analysing them according to the canons of historical sociology.

4. Problems of analysis and description

Undertaking to analyse changes in the Polish countryside between 1918 and 2018, I was not fully aware of the difficulties I would face in this work. The first group of problems was caused by the evolution of the social sciences in the period in question. In the early 20th century these sciences – from anthropology, through to economics, political science, psychology and sociology – were just starting to become independent and institutionalised. In the course of 100 years they developed their theoretical base, their methods, and created their own languages. Gradually, the canons of analysis emerged within individual disciplines together with their own typical indicators. The plans of individual studies (included in the three volumes of the monograph *Continuity and Change*) were based on the contemporary theoretical and methodological state of the disciplines. Later it often turned out that an analysis based on the contemporary canons was impossible because there were no source materials for earlier periods. This might be because a given phenomenon had emerged in a later period, or because it had become a focus of interest for a given discipline much later. One example might be sociology, in which (in Poland) analyses of social-occupational structure did not appear until the 1960s.

The second group of problems was related to changes in the borders of the Polish state that occurred in the course of the century under consideration. One could even say that Poland is a typical case for this region of Europe, as evidenced by the changeability of nation-state borders after the two world wars and after 1989 (cf. Foucher 1993). On the map of Poland in Fig. 1 we can distinguish three types of territory: historical lands that belonged to Austria-Hungary, Russia and Prussia during the partitions; “lost lands”

that belonged to Russia and Austria-Hungary during the partitions and today belong to Ukraine, Belarus and Lithuania; and recovered territories that either never belonged to Poland or had been lost centuries before. The approach adopted was that the analyses would cover areas actually within the Polish state in different historical periods of the previous century.

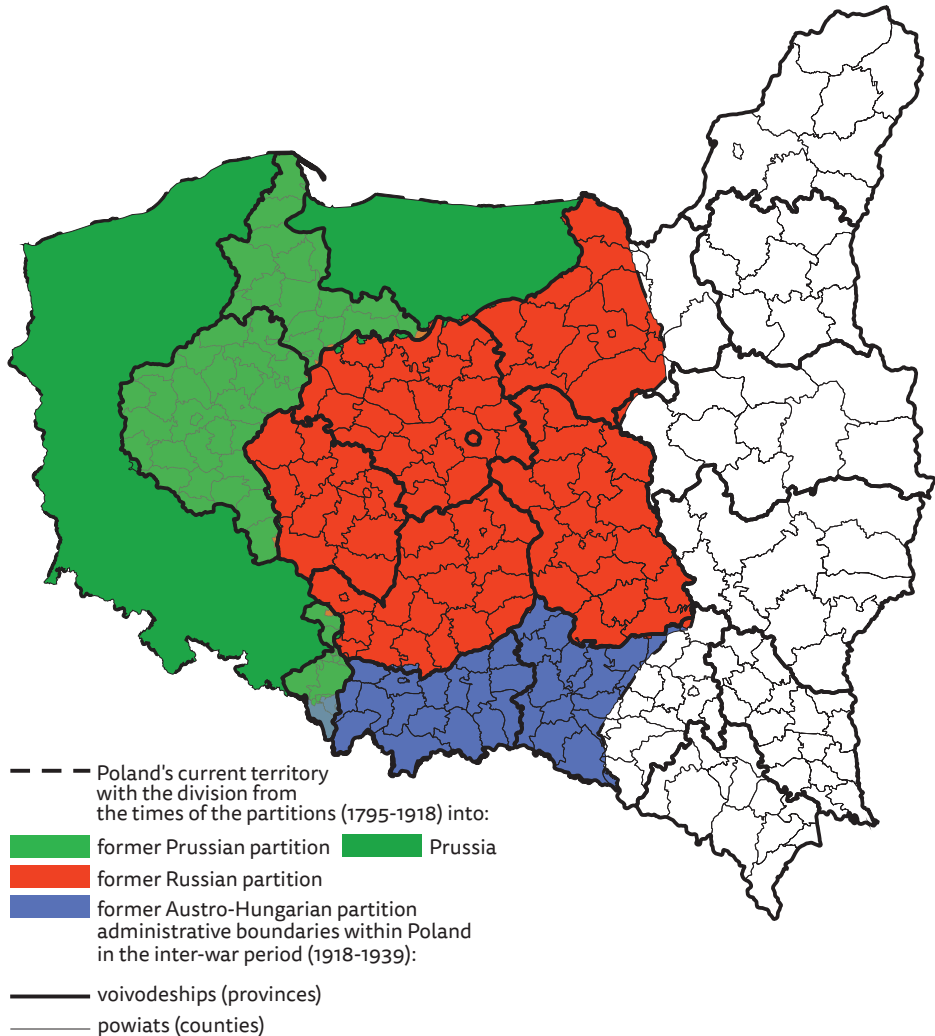


Figure 1. Visualisation of historical borders compared to Poland's present territory

Source: Frenkel, Rosner, Stanny 2019, p. 81.

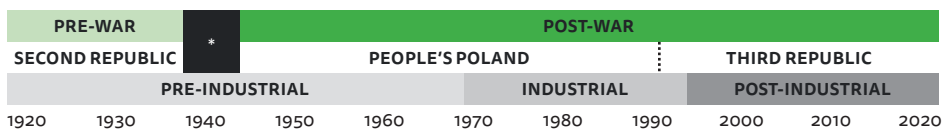
In the case of some analyses, this territorial instability was of great importance due to the general methodological directive formulated on the basis of Piotr Sztompka's concept of "the becoming of society". It emphasises the historical component of the becoming of society and the existing path dependence, since "people form society and history, only not randomly but in given structural conditions inherited from the past, which they in turn consolidate or modify for their successors" (Sztompka 2003, p. 527). This is compounded by the problem of language, which we failed to appreciate properly at the outset of the analysis: appropriate names had to be found for things and trends. This applies especially to the period of communist People's Poland and its newspeak. Sometimes we would automatically repeat names found in the source literature of the period. Meanwhile, "socialised" agriculture was not socialised at all, it was state-owned or quasi-cooperative; cooperatives were not real cooperatives; an act of parliament was actually a decree of the state/the communist party, because if it was put before the parliament it could not fail to be passed. This required careful thought to be given to the nomenclature itself, because – as George Orwell rightly pointed out:

A man may take to drink because he feels himself to be a failure, and then fail all the more completely because he drinks. It is rather the same thing that is happening to language. It becomes ugly and inaccurate because our thoughts are foolish, but the slovenliness of our language makes it easier for us to have foolish thoughts (cited from Florczak 1995, p. 13).

A hundred years is a long time, and a record of the state of affairs at its two defining moments can provide information about the direction of change that is occurring, but says little about its rhythm and accompanying circumstances. The problem of time and its periodisation appeared in all of the studies, and we gradually came to realise the existence of different kinds of time. On the one hand, there is external, conventional time: a phenomenon occurred at a certain time, a process lasted from ... to ... But there is another time – internal time, the time of every phenomenon or process, social time. Historical time is composed of thin layers of time superimposed on one another; if we invoke Michel Foucault (2000), there is a multiplicity of historical times. But time is also a social construct, an emanation of social life, it is a network of relations reflecting and shaping the temporal relationships between phenomena, events and social actions (Sztompka 2003, p. 475). That is why I attached great importance to building a timeline for arranging phenomena and processes,

so that later, looking at them superimposed on one another, we could indicate “cold periods” when change was almost imperceptible and “hot periods” with an accumulation of many changes and interfering processes.

The timeline is delimited by two years: 1918 and 2018. Conventionally speaking in terms of years, of course this line can be divided in any way at all. However, it is also divided by events. We thus have the time of the Second Republic, delimited by Poland’s reappearance on the political map of the world and the outbreak of World War II, the time of the war, 1939–1945, and the post-war time. World War II is the turning point for the “territorial time” described above. But the “post-war time” encompasses almost half a century (1944–1989) of People’s Poland (although the name Polish People’s Republic (PRL) did not appear until 1952) and the time of the Third Republic, which began in 1990. What is important in this periodisation is the cut-off separating the Second Republic from People’s Poland (and this was not just the war period) and then People’s Poland from the Third Republic. These “cut-offs” are described well by the expression “cultural trauma”, although Sztompka only used this for the latter case. This periodisation does not coincide with the universal periodisation based on the structure of the economy and the employment structure that is its consequence. In the course of 100 years the Polish economy shifted from the pre-industrial stage, when it was based on the primary sector, i.e. chiefly agriculture, to a post-industrial economy based on the tertiary sector, i.e. services. The pre-industrial stage lasted until the 1960s; the shift to the post-industrial stage took place at the end of the 20th century.⁹ At the same time, it describes the transition from a traditional society to a modern one whose features (and thus also definition) are undergoing constant change. The changed place of the countryside and agriculture in society is a consequence of that transition.



* World War II

Figure 2.
Main turning points on the timeline

Source: own work.

⁹ Based on the three-sector model of labour, it is assumed (cf. Kosiński 1989, p. 231) that in a pre-industrial society more than 60% of the population work in agriculture, in an industrial society more than 60% of the economically active population work outside agriculture, while a post-industrial society is characterised by a high proportion of those employed in services.

But every event involving society has “its own” time, its internal or social time, and every social process has its own rhythm, beginning, culmination, decline and end. And this applies to all the processes analysed in the course of the century in question. It is only the collocation of these processes on the timeline that reveals “cold” periods in rural change, when changes were very slow, and “hot” periods when changes cumulated and processes overlapped. I will do my best to show this in summaries at the end of each of the four parts of the text.

I have introduced a new theme into the analysis, one absent from the studies published in the volumes of *Continuity and Change*. Namely, I have attempted to situate the changes under analysis within global processes that gave Poland a place in the semi-periphery (Wallerstein 1974), here limited to Central Europe. The distinctive character of this region was suggested in the mid-20th century by Oskar Halecki (1952), who proposed a division of Europe into Western, Central-Western, Central-Eastern and Eastern; in this division, Poland lay in Central-Eastern Europe. Following a similar path, Jenő Szűcs (1981) divided Europe into three parts, eliminating Central-Western Europe as a separate component; writing *The Price of Freedom*, a history of Central-Eastern Europe, Piotr Wandycz (1995) included Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary in the region – the countries that formed the Visegrád Triangle, which has now become the Quadrangle. In the present volume, these are the countries I mean when referring to Central Europe. Dividing Europe as he did, Wandycz noted the existence of zones at different levels of development. “They interacted with one another, the more advanced countries (the core or centre) stimulating and challenging those more backward. ... The relationship had been generally more advantageous to the core, but a reduction of the periphery to a ‘colonial dependence’, augmenting its backwardness, was not always and necessarily the result of this intercourse” (Wandycz 2001, p. 4). I will try to take account of this regional, Central European background as far as possible.

*

In the mid-1960s Barrington Moore Jr. published his *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World*. This is now a canonical analysis of historical sociology. The author’s aim was to explain:

the varied political roles played by the landed upper classes and the peasantry in the transformation from agrarian societies ... to modern industrial ones.

Somewhat more specifically, it is an attempt to discover the range of historical conditions under which either or both of these rural groups have become important forces behind the emergence of Western parliamentary versions of democracy, and dictatorships of the right and the left, that is, fascist and communist regimes (Moore 1966/1983, p. 7).

The book does not contain a separate analysis of Central-Eastern Europe, not to mention the situation of Poland, which until 1918 was split between the countries that gave rise to two totalitarian regimes: one of the right, one of the left. It is not my ambition to fill this gap. I do hope, however, that readers of the present volume will stop to reflect on the extent to which the Polish “agrarian classes” were co-responsible for the social orders that developed during the 100 years being analysed here.

1. THE RURAL POPULATION: EVOLUTION OF DEMOGRAPHIC AND SOCIAL STRUCTURES

In 1918, three-quarters of Poland's population lived in the countryside, in 2018 two-fifths;
in 1918, 85% of rural residents made a living from farming, in 2018 approx. 20%.
How did this come about?

In 1918, Poland, like all the countries in the region, was a rural country.¹⁰ According to the 1921 census, the Polish population totalled 27,177,000, with rural residents¹¹ accounting for 75.4%. The first census after World War II (in 1946) reported that Poland's population was 23,930,000, of whom 16,166,000 (i.e. 68%) were rural residents. In 2016 the population totalled 38,433,000, of whom 15,303,500 (i.e. 39.2%) lived in the countryside. Whereas from 1945 to 2015 the overall population grew by 300,000 per year on average, the number of rural residents remained stable at around 15 million. This means that their share in Poland's total population decreased systematically. In short, deruralisation of the country took place, a trend that was not shared by all the countries of Central Europe.

1. Changes in the size and demographic structure of the rural population

Deruralisation was halted around 2000 (Fig. 3). The course of the process was influenced by the development of towns and cities, their number having grown from 611 in 1921 to 933 in 2017, where this growth was largely caused by changes in the administrative status of different localities. However, "the changing share of the rural and urban populations, apart from different natural population growth rates in rural and urban areas, was also affected by migration processes and changes in the administrative division" (Frenkel, Rosner, Stanny 2019, p. 79). Let us trace the dynamics and interference of demographic trends that determine the actual population growth, even though it is hard to assess their contribution to the final result with any precision.

¹⁰ In 1900 the share of the rural population in Poland was estimated at 73.4%, in Hungary 61.9%, in Czechoslovakia 57.9%; in 1990 the rural population in Poland accounted for 85% of that in 1900, in Czechoslovakia 54%, and in Hungary 101.8% (Eberhard, 1991).

¹¹ Throughout the period under consideration, being counted among the rural population was based on the administrative criterion, i.e. a locality's legal status.

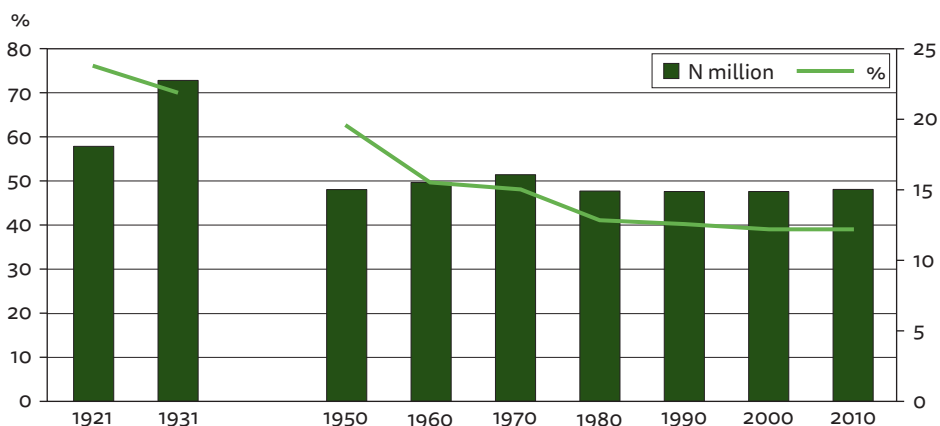


Figure 3.
Deruralisation of Poland 1921–2010

Source: Halamska, Zwęglińska-Gałęcka 2019, p. 204.

In the century under analysis, the pattern of reproduction and mortality in the rural population underwent a transformation. The average life expectancy increased substantially, from just under 50 years in 1931 to 73 for men and as much as 82 years for women in 2016; the difference between men and women more than tripled during this period. Infant mortality decreased significantly, from 120 deaths per 1,000 live births in 1947 to four in 2016. The fertility rate also decreased considerably: since 1997 (more than 10 years later than in urban areas) it has been below the replacement-level fertility rate of 2.1 children per woman of childbearing age. The initially slow rate of natural population growth¹² began increasing rapidly due to lengthening life expectancy and decreasing infant mortality coupled with a high fertility rate, and then – as the fertility rate fell – it gradually decreased to a low level. This occurred in the period between the end of World War II and 1985. Since then we have seen a systematic decline in natural population growth: nationwide, it has been negative since 2002, and oscillating around zero in rural areas since 2015. This is the effect of changes initiated in the 1990s and related to the values, norms and behaviours of Polish society.¹³ According to Izabela Frenkel, Andrzej Rosner and Monika Stanny (2019), these changes turned out to be a universal trend

¹² This shows the difference between the crude birth rate (live births per 1,000 inhabitants) and the crude death rate (deaths per 1,000 inhabitants).

¹³ This trend appeared in all of Central Europe; the United Nations Report (2003) points to “an unprecedented demographic crisis” caused by the breakdown of previous reproduction patterns.

whose course is described by what is known as demographic transition.¹⁴ They also defined the trend of change in the age structure of the rural population. The regularities outlined above appeared a little later in Poland compared to highly developed countries.

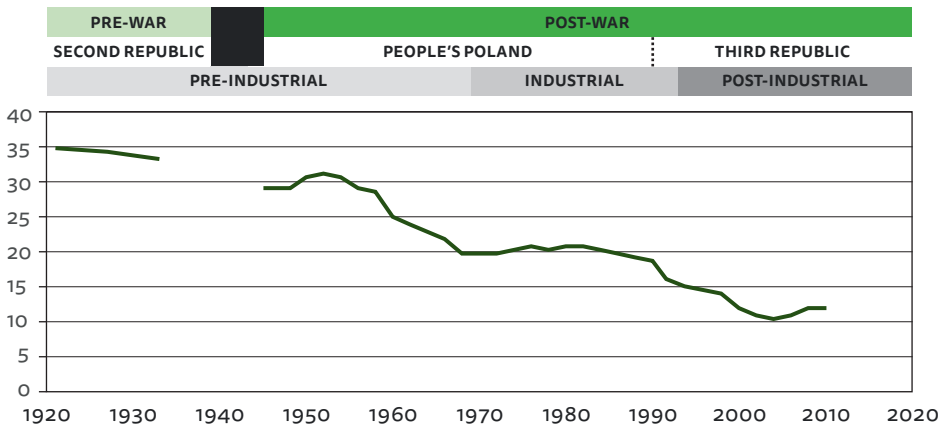


Figure 4.
Birth rate in rural Poland 1921–2016, in %

Source: Frenkel, Rosner, Stanny 2019, p. 93.

The other factor affecting the size of the rural population was external and internal migration. Irrespective of the period, emigrations are not very well documented statistically; we can speak, however – after Jerzy Holzer (1999) – of emigration waves, in which people from the countryside played a considerable part, especially in the period between the two world wars. The emigrants headed for European countries (France, Germany) as well as across the ocean, to the United States, Canada and South America. These emigrations were undertaken chiefly for economic reasons. In the era of People’s Poland, people mainly emigrated for political reasons. Substantial territorial mobility of the population was reported in the 1940s, when it was caused by the outcome of World War II, including changed national borders (settlement

¹⁴ The theory of demographic transition was outlined in 1929 by Warren Thompson, who defined it as a “historically shaped process of change in the population’s reproduction pattern, changes essentially consisting in moving away from an archaic type of demographic balance (high fertility and high mortality) and gradually shifting to a modern type of balance (low mortality and low fertility)” (Rosset, Billing 1987, p. 42). In the late 1980s Dirk J. van de Kaa (1987) proposed the concept of the second demographic transition, involving changes in the outlook of individuals, their system of values, attitude towards family and society, expressed in new demographic behaviours.

migration). In that time rural Poland lost more than 900,000 people, mainly due to the displacement of Germans from the Western and Northern Territories as well as emigration to Israel. The next wave of emigration of Germans and autochthonous peoples (Masurians, Warmians/Ermlanders, Kashubians and Silesians) took place with varying intensity between 1956 and 1989, and of Jews from 1968 to 1969. The last wave of political emigration was from 1981 to 1990 and also affected the countryside, although much less than it did urban areas. Emigration from the Polish Third Republic has been due to economic reasons, and intensified after Poland joined the European Union in 2004. Estimates put the number of Polish citizens currently living outside the country at approx. 2–2.5 million, some of whom will never return. Rural emigrants account for a significant percentage of the total, although they have taken advantage of opportunities to go abroad much less often than urban residents.

Table 2.

Factors of the balance¹⁵ of changes in the rural population size after World War II (in thousands)

Years	Natural population growth	Balance of internal migration ^a	Balance of international migration ^a	Balance of administrative changes	Actual population growth
1946–1950	1,416.4	-1,010.0	-908.7	-	-502.3
1951–1960	2,878.6	-955.1	-17.3	-1,540.1	366.1
1961–1970	1,894.0	-1,200.6	-71.6	-81.0	540.8
1971–1980	1,686.0	-2,005.4	-80.3	-393.3	-793.0
1981–1990	1,308.9	-1,344.0	-46.1	-197.3	-278.5
1991–2000	456.3	-364.2	-17.1	-103.0	28.0
2001–2010	117.5	337.6	-35.1	-102.9	317.1
2011–2015	41.5	191.0	-14.9	-49.0	168.7

^a Data exclusively for migrations covered by statistical surveys.

Source: Frenkel, Rosner, Stanny 2019, p. 100.

Throughout the 20th century, rural areas were a source for recruiting labour for towns and cities. Internal migrations – as Table 2 presents – show a negative balance up to the year 2000. Towns and cities absorbed most of the high natural population growth in rural areas. This trend changed after

¹⁵ The information for the balance of the population is sourced from administrative records on births, deaths, and internal and international migrations (permanent and temporary residence). The balance does not account for undocumented and illegal migrations.

2000: the internal migration balance became positive for the countryside and the size and share of the rural population slowly started growing. However, this simple picture becomes more complicated when a third factor is taken into account: changes in the administrative division, when what used to be a village turns into a town as a result of official reclassification. The impact of this factor is substantial, especially in certain periods, e.g. the 1950s and 1970s, but also in the early 21st century, when only relatively small changes were made to Poland's administrative division.

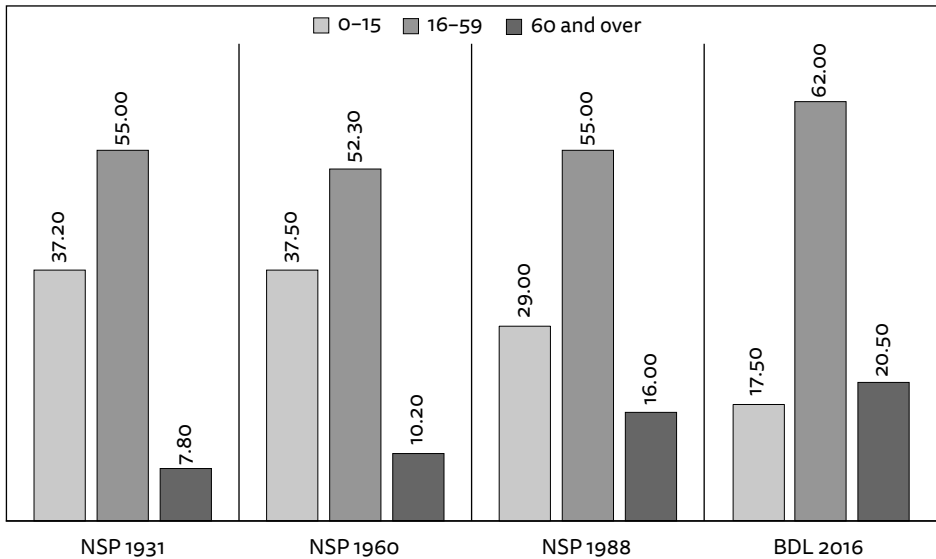
Migrations, both internal and external, have a visible impact on the age and sex structure. This applies to migration for economic reasons above all, and is the effect of something called the selectiveness of migration. Already described in England in the 19th century by Ernest G. Ravenstein, it means that "migration processes involve mainly the young, better educated, more enterprising etc. Moreover, women migrate more often than men. All these correlations have been confirmed by the statistics of migration in Poland" (Frenkel, Rosner, Stanny 2019, p. 99 et seq.).

The evolution of the demographic structure that is an effect primarily of internal migration involves changes in the age structure and sex structure of the rural population. The progressive age pyramid of the 1930s, with a broad base (formed by the youngest population, aged 0–9 years), changed to a stationary pyramid in the 1970s (the base started shrinking and the tip flattened; this means the population started losing its capacity to grow), and at the turn of the century evolved towards a regressive pyramid.

This means that on the centenary of regained independence, Polish society, crossing the "threshold of demographic old age", is becoming a society that is irreversibly ageing. The capacity for increasing the population size is slowly disappearing, the share of children is diminishing or stabilising at a low level, the number of deaths has outpaced the number of births and, as a result, the natural population growth rate is becoming negative (ibid., p. 103 et seq.).

Despite the turnaround in migration trends at the turn of the century, rural Poland will reach this state after 2020.

The selectivity of internal migration is also manifested in uneven sex ratios, as more young women migrate from rural to urban areas. A shortage of women of childbearing age, which had already emerged in the 1970s, leads to lower natural growth of the rural population, but also causes a phenomenon described



NSP – National Census.

BDL – Local Data Bank (Statistics Poland – GUS).

Figure 5.

Evolution of the rural population age structure 1931–2016

Source: own work based on Frenkel, Rosner, Stanny 2019.

as “a lack of wives for farmers”. In older age groups, over 65, the share of women grows due to their much higher (by nine years) average life expectancy.

The above processes are also tied to modifications in labour resources, as seen in the changing share of the “economic” age groups, here: pre-working age (0–17 years), working age (18–59 years for women, 18–64 years for men) and post-working age (60 and over for women, 65 and over for men). The proportions between them changed fundamentally during the century under consideration. In 1921 the share of the pre-working-age population was equal to that of the working-age population. In 2020 the shares of the pre-working-age and post-working-age groups were equal. The trend of changes in the course of the century is clear: an increasing share of the working and post-working-age population, a decreasing share of the pre-working-age group. These processes led to a fundamental change in the demographic dependency ratio: in 1921, there was 1 person of working age to 1.1 people of non-working age; in 2020 it was 0.64 people. This very favourable index grew slightly from 2010, and its further decrease is predicted by tendencies already visible today and based

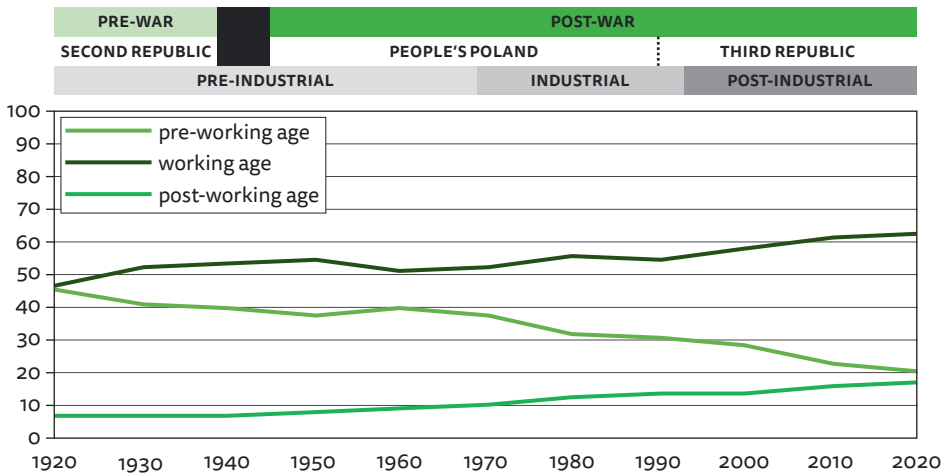


Figure 6.
Rural population by economic age groups (in %)

Source: own work based on Rosner, Stanny 2019, p. 129.

on demographic forecasts, as rural areas have also entered a stage of reduced reproduction of the workforce.

The changes in the workforce reflect the demographic processes taking place in the century from 1918 to 2018. In the light of data on the scale of natural population growth in rural areas, the increase in the share of the working-age category was relatively small as a result of internal migration. According to estimates, approx. two million people migrated from rural to urban areas in the 1970s, most of them immediately after reaching working age. These mass migrations (see Table 2) lasted until the 1990s; their decline and subsequent changes in the migration balance to the advantage of rural areas resulted in an increased share of the working-age population, which coincided with the period of post-communist transformation.

The size of the rural population in Poland has changed little over the past century. It grew from 20.6 million to 24.3 million in the inter-war period. World War II brought substantial losses: the rural population dropped to approx. 15 million in 1950 and stayed at this level up to the end of the century under analysis. The war-time plunge in the rural population was the result of territorial changes, as the loss of the eastern borderland left national minorities outside Poland's borders: most Ukrainians, Belarusians, Russians, but also Germans (who were expelled from the Recovered Territories) – in

total they accounted for some 20% of the population. Also, some Poles decided against repatriation to Poland after the war. Added to this was the extermination of the Jews by Nazi Germany and their subsequent emigration (8.6% of the Second Republic's population) as well as the victims of the terror waged against Polish people by both the Germans and Soviet Russia.

Population processes connected with demographic transition and alternating birth rate highs and lows had a strong impact on the sex and age structure. Changing national borders, migration between rural and urban areas, and also amendments to the division of the country into towns/cities and rural areas influenced the size of the rural population. If, however, we consider migration selectivity on the basis of the main demographic features, i.e. age and sex, during periods of intense migration between rural and urban areas they not only affected the size of the rural population but also became an additional factor in shaping its structures. One could say that the aforementioned processes shaped the rural population which had a steadily decreasing share in the overall population (Rosner, Stanny 2019, p. 119).

2. Changes in educational levels and structure

At the same time, other processes changing the social structure of the rural population, and thus also its collective identity, were also taking place. One of the most important of these was the process of change in the educational structure, from the elimination of illiteracy, through the (quite) common secondary school-leaving exam (*matura*), to increasingly widespread tertiary education. This was made possible by the development of the system of education, its model changing significantly over time.¹⁶ In the early 20th century Poland had a high illiteracy rate, inherited from the times of the partitions. It reached 40% in rural areas¹⁷ and was regionally diverse: it was highest among the Orthodox population in the eastern borderland. A 1919 decree introduced compulsory education in the whole of Poland, as an expression of the belief that "the times when it was enough to know how to sow, plough or ply a trade without at least an elementary education, i.e. reading, writing and counting skills, are now in the past" (Cezak 1929, p. 129). Illiteracy was eliminated mainly by promoting education among the younger population. In

¹⁶ Changes in the education system are described in Chapter 3.

¹⁷ The percentage of illiterate people was highest in the former Russian partition, especially the eastern borderland of Poland, and lowest in the former Prussian partition. This was related to different times of introducing compulsory education and different ways of enforcing it.

1931 the illiteracy rate in rural areas was still 27%, and in 1950 7%;¹⁸ illiteracy disappeared completely in the late 1970s.

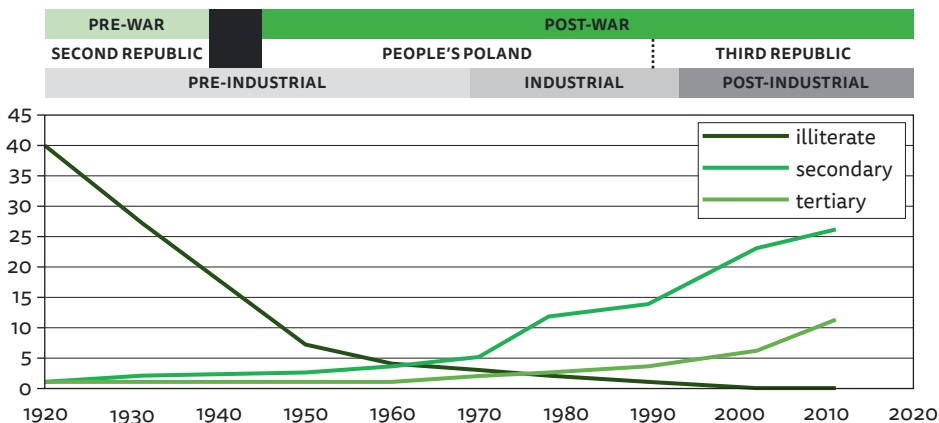


Figure 7. Trends of change in elements of the rural population’s educational structure 1921–2011

Source: own work based on census data.

The inter-war period was a time of a campaign against illiteracy and the promotion of elementary education. Illiteracy in rural areas was eradicated in the first decades of People’s Poland. From the 1960s, secondary education – general and vocational – became increasingly widespread. Between 1970 and 2011 the share of people with a secondary education in rural areas increased five-fold: from 5% to 26%. The 1990s saw a new and dynamic trend: a growing share of people with a tertiary education, from 1.8% in 1988 to over 10% in 2011. The educational level negatively correlates with age: younger people represent a much higher level than the oldest group.¹⁹ The education of women in rural areas improved significantly: after 2000 their education level indices were higher on average than those for men. Despite these changes, the educational level of the rural population is still lower than that of the urban population, although the pace of change was faster in rural areas in some periods. The changes in the level of education also indicate an evolution taking place in the social-occupational structure.

¹⁸ This was the effect not only of a campaign to eradicate illiteracy after World War II, but also territorial changes that left Poland’s pre-war Ukrainian and Belarusian population outside the new border. In 1921, the illiteracy rate among the Orthodox population had reached 72%.

¹⁹ For example, in the 25–29 age group one in four people have a tertiary education.

3. Changes in the rural social-occupational structure

A social structure is “a system of any elements, starting from individuals and families, all the way to segments of class structure, such as labourers or peasants” (Domański 2004, p. 9). It is of great importance for diagnosing the state and dynamics of a society, as a social structure “always characterises the state of a given society, it serves as its ID of sorts, a set of identity features, while at the same time being an element and causal factor of the social dynamics” (Gilejko 2010, p. 17). In the century under consideration, it underwent enormous changes due to political, economic and global factors. Its evolution needs to be situated within the broader context of changes in the social-occupational structure of the whole of Polish society, which went through three stages of development during this period: from pre-industrial, through industrial, to post-industrial. Each of these stages involved a specific structure of the (three) sectors of the economy: the first encompassing agriculture, forestry, fishing and mining, the second comprising industry and construction, and the third comprising services in a broad sense. This is illustrated by the employment structure. The pre-industrial stage is dominated by employment in the first sector of the economy,²⁰ in the industrial stage employment in the second and third sectors exceeds 60%, and in the post-industrial stage most of those employed work in the third sector. These stages of economic development do not coincide with the periodisation defined by political events and types of political system in the country. The whole Second Republic period (1918–1939) was uniform, belonging to the pre-industrial stage. Changes in the employment structure were very minor: employment dropped in the first sector and increased slightly in the second sector. The period of communist People’s Poland was very diverse: until ca. 1970 Poland remained in the pre-industrial stage (as an industrial and agricultural country), although employment in the first sector decreased by more than 30 percentage points.

The industrial stage covered the next 20 years, ending with relative equilibrium (see Fig. 8) in employment in the three sectors around the year 1990. This was a very dynamic period during which the directions of further change emerged. In the Third Republic, during the economic transformation and the adjustment of the rules of its functioning towards a market economy in the 1990s, the country moved into the post-industrial stage: 60% of the

²⁰ According to Roszkowski (1995), ca. 1920 in Poland the farming population accounted for 75% of the overall population, in Hungary 58%, in Czechoslovakia 35%.

employed worked in the third sector, 30% in the second sector and 10% in the first sector.

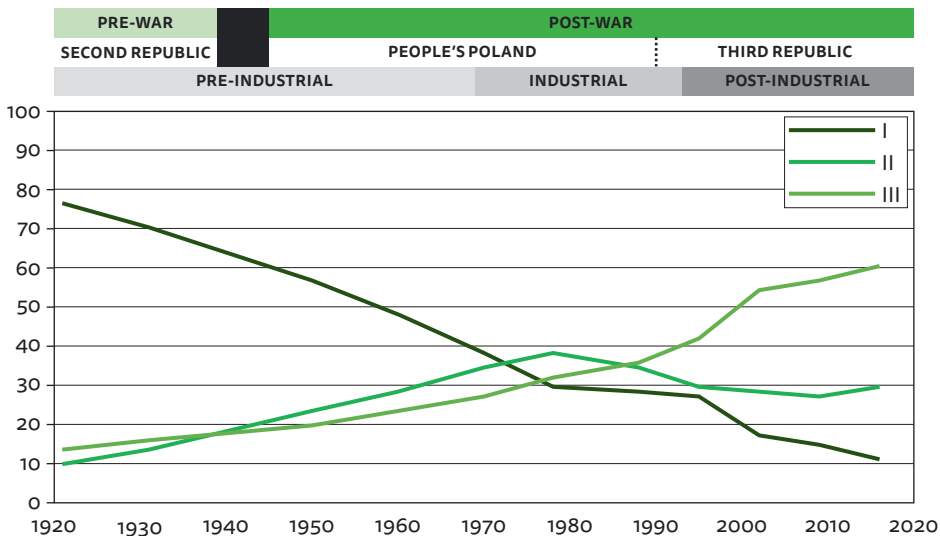


Figure 8.
Employment in Poland by sector 1920–2018

Source: Halamska, Zwęglińska-Gatecka 2019, p. 239.

The process of change in the social-occupational structure of rural Poland needs to be considered in the above context.

3.1. Initial state: rural population structure in the Second Republic

In the Second Republic, the agrarian population (i.e. people making a living off farms and/or work in agriculture) accounted for approx. 80% of the rural population. It comprised people living in peasant villages and on manor farms; both these structures included people who owned land (farmers) and those who did not (the landless). This division does not coincide with the division into the agrarian and non-agrarian population, since landless people making a living in agriculture belonged to the agrarian population, while owners of small farms could make a living mainly from work outside agriculture, e.g. working in a trade. Władysław Grabski (1929, p. 441) divided the rural population into three groups: the landless, who accounted for 31% of the rural population in 1922, owners

of larger (above 100 ha) and medium-sized (20–100 ha) farms, who made up approx. 2.5% of the rural population,²¹ and farmers, who accounted for 67.5%.²² Owning land as well as the property's area were important but not the only factors affecting the social structure of rural Poland at that time. The "farmer" population included a distinct class of larger landowners and land leaseholders. This group, whom today we might call agricultural entrepreneurs, were labelled *obszarnik*²³ in communist Poland; *ziemianie*²⁴ dominated in this group.²⁵ The size of this landowner element of the structure can be estimated on the basis of the number of farms over 50 ha in area. In 1921 there were 19,500 manor farms over 50 ha, in 1931 there were 16,200. According to data from the 1931 census, all the manor farms were home to some 70,000 people, while there were about 60,000 on *ziemianie* manor farms. The size of manor farms varied greatly: about a third were under 100 ha, and a tenth were over 1,000 ha. According to Janusz Żarnowski (1973, p. 287), "Within the *obszarnik* class one can distinguish three groups: the aristocracy (counts, dukes, entailers), other *ziemianie* (internally diverse in terms of amount of property and level of wealth) and the non-*ziemianie* part of the *obszarnik* class". This reflects the great diversity of this group, which was visibly shrinking in the inter-war period. Large landowners were the best-educated group in Poland at the time, and part of this group belonged to the urban intelligentsia (cf. Chałasiński 1946). As a group they enjoyed high albeit diverse prestige. "Ziemianie, and especially the aristocracy, were, in the eyes of practically all of society, at the top of the social ladder, where this was acknowledged not only by the elite in terms of wealth and power but also the broad petite bourgeoisie and the popular masses" (Żarnowski 1973, p. 289).

The other segment – which dominated the rural social structure – comprised small-property owners. This was the segment of the peasant population with farms of 0.5–50 ha. Żarnowski (*ibid.*, p. 132) reported that in 1921 the peasant

²¹ Own calculations based on the farm population structure provided by Grabski (1929).

²² This group of farmers comprised: large farmers (5–20 ha) 19.5% of the rural population, smaller farmers (2–5 ha) 26%, and small farmers (below 2 ha) 22%.

²³ A derogatory term for someone with a lot of land – translator's annotation.

²⁴ Originally: landed gentry – translator's annotation.

²⁵ Here we have to contend with problems of nomenclature, as mentioned earlier. They also appear when discussing the uniform period of the Second Republic. Irena Rychlikowa (1983) stated that "Who owns a landed estate of over 50 ha is of the *ziemianie* group"; Janusz Żarnowski (1973, p. 281) distinguished between the two groups. *Obszarnik* was the wider category, encompassing all owners of estates. *Ziemianie*, meanwhile, were the heirs of historical noble families or new owners descended from gentry. These *ziemianie* accounted for 75–80% of the *obszarnik* class. The rest were peasants who had grown rich, the bourgeoisie and Jews.

population stood at 14.2 million and in 1938 it was 17.4 million, an increase of 2.8 million, or 23%.

Table 3.

Social structure of the peasant population 1921–1938

Social categories of the peasant population*	1921	1931	1938
Peasant population in millions			
population of Poland	27.2	32.1	34.1
rural population	20.6	23.4	24.3
peasant population	14.2	16.4	17.4
semi-proletariat	1.2	1.6	1.8
smallholding peasants	5.9	6.8	7.3
medium-holding peasants	5.3	6.2	6.4
rich peasants	1.8	1.8	1.9
Peasant population as a percentage			
of the population of Poland	52.2	51.0	51.0
of the rural population	68.9	70.0	71.6
Percentage of the peasant population			
peasant population	100.0	100.0	100.0
semi-proletariat	8.5	9.7	10.4
smallholding peasants	41.5	40.5	41.9
medium-holding peasants	37.3	37.0	36.9
rich peasants	12.7	12.8	10.8

* These categories were based on farm size. The 1931 census distinguished four categories. They were: semi-proletariat – up to 2 ha, smallholding peasants – 2–5 ha, medium-holding peasants – 5–10 ha, rich peasants – 10–50 ha.

Source: Halamska, Zwęglińska-Gatecka 2019, p. 208; based on Żarnowski 1973.

The share of the thus-defined peasant population in rural areas oscillated around 70% throughout the inter-war period, but it differed between regions. In statistics and studies, farm area is used as the basis for dividing the peasant population into several categories. A farm's area reflected wealth, it was related to income and the capacity to support the family running it (also depending on natural conditions and management approach), and it also decided the way the farm was managed as well as defining labour relations. Larger farms owned by rich peasants used different forms of hired labour,²⁶ smaller farms – owned by the semi-proletariat and smallholding peasants – sold some of their labour

²⁶ There were about 600,000–700,000 such farms in 1931. They employed farmhands, hired workers paid by the day and, above all, took advantage of labour for debt.

resources, in various forms, to the manor farm and larger peasant farms. In the period under analysis the peasant group was dominated by small-holding peasants; medium-holding peasants were the other very numerous group. The pace of growth in the different groups varied: the number and share of the semi-proletariat and smallholders (together accounting for over half the peasant population) grew steadily, whereas the share of the medium-holding and rich peasant categories decreased – despite their growing numbers.

Alongside peasants, the rural population included those without land, “the class of tradesmen, merchants, rural innkeepers, a small ... rural intelligentsia class, all kinds of functionaries of state and local-government bodies or private companies, then the class of old-age and disability pensioners, war invalids ...” (Jabłonowski 1937, p. 167). If we add “hired labour in agriculture” to this group, the total would account for approx. 30% of the rural population (29.5% in 1921 and 29% in 1931). According to analyses by the Institute of Social Economy (cf. *ibid.*, pp. 188–247), the rural landless population comprised:

- a) labourers, i.e. all those “who make a living as hired labour, both working on the land and working as unskilled hired labour in nearby brickyards, saw-mills, flour mills ...”; they accounted for over 13% of the rural population;
- b) rural entrepreneurs, manufacturers and traders, “the rural petite bourgeoisie in the literal sense of the word – both traders or shopkeepers and rural tradesmen: carpenters, bricklayers, shoemakers, tailors, seamstresses, wheelwrights, blacksmiths”, milk sellers and cart drivers with a horse and cart; these “entrepreneurs”, whom today we would classify as tradesmen and self-employed, accounted for 6.3% of the rural population;
- c) manual labourers with regular jobs employed at local manufacturing plants, mines and sugar factories, foresters, railway workers, postal workers, whose social situation corresponded to that of the “higher layers of the big-city proletariat”; this group accounted for approx. 2% of the rural population and today would be classified in the social-occupational group of skilled labourers;
- d) white-collar workers with regular jobs who counted as the rural intelligentsia in olden times and today are classified as specialists (e.g. teachers), technicians and auxiliary personnel as well as office workers, who accounted for approx. 1.8% of the rural population;
- e) old-age and disability pensioners and annuitants, who accounted for 1.8% of the rural population.

The structure of the landless population needs discussing in greater detail in order to understand the rationale behind the rural social system’s

functioning in the inter-war period. First of all, this population included farm labourers, numbering approx. three million according to the 1931 census.²⁷ The group was made up of manor-farm labourers (1.4 million),²⁸ peasant servants (farmhands, maids – 0.4 million), hired manual labourers (1 million) and others (0.2 million). Manor-farm labourers (mostly living in manor/manor-farm housing) were permanent labourers, whereas seasonal labourers were recruited from among hired manual labourers (who often also had a plot of land and provided labour for debt). The latter were hired by both manor farms and peasant farms. The other numerous group among the landless population was that of entrepreneurs, manufacturers and traders, i.e. the rural segment of the petite bourgeoisie. Żarnowski indicates that typical examples of petite bourgeoisie included tradesmen, shopkeepers, traders, i.e. people who today would be classified as working in trade and services. This group numbered approx. 1.3 million in rural areas, or 36% of Poland's petite bourgeoisie. The majority of this group were Jewish: in 1921, 52% of economically active Jews belonged to this group, in 1931 it was 48% (Żarnowski 1973).²⁹

The rural population in a broad sense included all the categories present in Poland at the time. Their social positions ranged from the landless poor at one end to the aristocracy at the top of the social hierarchy. At the same time, the countryside formed a distinctive social system, whose distinctness was defined by "the contrast between that whole world, the world governed by the relations of a money economy, and the world that, regardless of its members' wealth or poverty, continues in a natural economy" (Czarnowski 1956, p. 183). These relations typical of an agricultural, pre-industrial society were unusual in developed Europe, but not rare in its central part (Roszkowski 1995). This rural world was split by two main lines of social division. The first, based on class, ran between the "lordly world" and the "peasant world" which "stood opposite each other but remained in an inevitable symbiosis" (Żarnowski 1973, p. 290). They were connected by a dense network of relations based on collaboration and dependence, but also antagonism. The other line dividing rural society was defined by ownership of land and the land's size. Peasants were the dominant component of the rural social structure; they were a culturally uniform class, but divided into several categories economically: rich peasants, owners of medium-sized farms, owners of stunted farms, landless

²⁷ Cited from Żarnowski (1973, p. 118).

²⁸ They comprised many categories and formed a complex hierarchy. They included – in order of hierarchy – tradesmen, caretakers, field hands, errand boys, and others (ibid., pp. 118–119).

²⁹ Jerzy Tomaszewski (1985) states, for example, that they accounted for 58.7% of those involved in "trade and insurance".

zagrodnik peasants,³⁰ *komornik* peasants³¹ etc. On a local scale the relations between these categories were based on a patron-client relationship and determined the considerable cohesion (strong integration) of local communities.

3.2. Processes of change in the social structure

3.2.1. Peasantisation

Changes in the social structure were minor in the inter-war period, and were mainly the result of the increasing number of peasant family farms in agriculture: a growing amount of land was owned by peasants, and more and more rural families lived off farming (Table 3). The absolute and relative growth of the share of the peasant population in society is known in the literature as “peasantisation”.³² It was a process that began in Poland with the granting of freehold to peasants in the 19th century and ended on the threshold of the 1960s, when land collectivised in the first half of the 1950s was returned to peasants. In the inter-war Second Republic, peasantisation was the effect of two groups of factors: the agricultural reform (parcelling out of land) and the splitting of farms. A 1934 study by the Institute of Social Economy shows that approx. 19% of new farms appeared in 1920–1934. The main factor in the increased number and share of the peasant population was the splitting of farms. This intensified during the Great Depression of the 1930s, when economic emigration to other countries as well as migration to cities became limited. Due to this “negative agrarian evolution”, as Konstancy Czerniewski (*ibid.*, p. 133) called it, peasantisation was often coupled with the pauperisation of the peasant population. After World War II, in the 1940s, the pace of peasantisation temporarily intensified. As a result of a radical agricultural reform introduced in 1944, 1.2 million hectares of land in the Old Territories and 5 million hectares in the Western and Northern Territories were distributed among landless and smallholding peasants. As a result, 347,000 new farms were set up, while 254,000 existing ones increased their area. The peasantisation of rural areas was special in that it led to “averaging of the countryside” (Turski 1970, p. 211): a decrease in the share of the smallest and largest farms, and an increase in smallholding and medium-holding farms.

³⁰ With only a cottage and outbuildings, sometimes a garden – translator’s annotation.

³¹ Without even a cottage, living in richer peasants’ farmhouses – translator’s annotation.

³² Peasantisation: propagation of the peasant way of farming, based on family farms.

3.2.2. Professionalisation: its paths and effects

In the inter-war period about a third of the rural population did not belong to the peasantry, and this share dropped from 31.1% in 1921 to 28.4% in 1938. The dominant process was peasantisation, but observed regionally; in industrialised areas and those undergoing industrialisation (e.g. the construction of the Central Industrial Region, the port in Gdynia), a retreat from agriculture was observed and new categories of the working population appeared, mainly working-class labourers. This process intensified in the post-war period, when rural areas began a process of freeing themselves from a state of an “equilibrium of backwardness” and the social structure started losing its particular features to universal ones (Turski 1970).³³ This was facilitated by the initial openness of the social structure: “which was connected with industrialisation processes and mass migration from rural to urban areas. The main shifts in the social structure involved mobility from the category of farmers to that of labourers and an influx of representatives of both these categories to white-collar workers” (Domański 2015, p. 43). Throughout this period, changes in the rural social structure were primarily the result of changes in the structure of Poland’s economy. Entering the industrial stage not only meant the gradual diminishing of agriculture’s importance in the economy (deagrarianisation of the national economy), but above all the professionalisation of the social structure, i.e. the development of social diversity based on occupations defining individuals’ position in society.³⁴ In an industrial society “occupations are the kind of positions that must be achieved through individual effort, on the basis of skills, training, knowledge” (Domański 2004, p. 105); these are activities resulting from the division of labour, performed for others and giving the person performing them a source of livelihood. Professionalisation in this sense was a complex process with not only a real-term aspect (new activities being distinguished or previously

³³ “By the term ‘particular system of social relations’ we denote a social order that is based on assigning individuals (and social groups) to strictly defined social positions and roles that are largely stable in the perspective of an individual life. On the other hand, by the term ‘universal system of social positions’ we denote a social order that is based on individuals (and social groups) acquiring social positions and roles that are dynamic in the perspective of an individual life” (Turski 1970, p. 213).

³⁴ “The origin of introducing occupations into sociological analysis therefore involves objective reasons. Occupational diversity became independent of other structural forms, obtaining separate capacity for creating positions, distances and barriers that decide about how societies function and what the lives of individuals are like. Occupational roles began to determine human actions, regardless of the different forms of assigning them, which were ruled by their own logic compatible with the requirements of the functioning of industrial societies” (Domański 2005b, p. 435).

unknown ones emerging) but also an awareness one; it raised awareness of the need for a differently constructed image of the social world, about the existence of other hierarchies of values and new social divisions, as yet hard to articulate (Jagiełło-Łysiowa 1967). Through this process – as the above-quoted Ryszard Turcki put it – the rural social structure lost its particular features and gained universal ones. Józef Chałasiński pointed out that professionalisation was “an evolution of fundamental nationwide importance” (1967, p. 11). This complex process changed over time. Three paths can be distinguished within it: depeasantisation, proletarianisation and embourgeoisement/gentrification. They are characterised below.

i. The depeasantisation path

The community most closely connected with agriculture, for whom it was the only or main source of livelihood, was made up of three groups: peasants (i.e. peasant individual farmers), hired labourers working on farms (private or state-owned), and – after the war – a small set of rural cooperative members. These situations were conducive to the development of different social identities (Rambaud 1982). The two non-peasant communities (cooperative farmers and workers on state-owned farms) were always diverse, with manual labourers at their core. These rural sub-communities were the first to be professionalised. The initially flat structure of production units (unskilled farm workers and few qualified specialists) diversified, not only due to the progressing division of labour but also because of changes in the organisational structures of state-owned farms.

People working in the group of engineering/technical and administrative/office staff included directors and production managers, managers of separate divisions, specialist staff: zootechnicians, agronomists, agricultural engineers, economists, chief accountants, self-government and welfare workers. Labourers of different levels of qualification and specialisation were employed, including plant and animal production labourers, combine harvester operators, tractor drivers, storemen, mechanical workshop employees (mechanics, turners, electricians, maintenance workers), renovation/construction group and transport group employees (Psyk-Piotrowska 2004, p. 152).

The “core” of the rural community was formed by peasant owners of private farms, who were long treated as a waning, “transitory” class in post-war sociological analyses. The main, although not very precise criterion for showing their

diversity from the inter-war period was farm area, whereas in later studies it was a farm's economic strength. Two professionalisation paths were typical of this agricultural sub-community: depeasantisation and rural proletarianisation.

The first path of rural social structure professionalisation was the transformation of the peasant into the "professional" farmer, i.e. depeasantisation professionalisation.

In an industrial society the producer of food ceases to be a 'peasant' and becomes a representative of one of many social-occupational groups – a 'farmer', who lives in a mass industrial society in which local communities have no greater autonomy than other groups and organisations and become the lowest rung of the political and administrative ladder (Mendras 1976, p. 11, English based on the Polish translation by M. Halamska).

At the same time, it was pointed out that a farmer was a special kind of occupation with many peculiarities, like the fact that the work was carried out by families and was largely autonomous, the activity it involved were very wide-ranging (Gałęski 1963), the occupation itself had many humanistic and ethical aspects (Manteuffel 1987), it was conducive to the independence of individuals, giving them occupational status (Jagiełło-Łysiowa 1967). The professionalisation of peasants, described in Western literature as "the end of the peasantry" (cf. Mendras 1967), progressed under the influence of the modernisation and innovation that was remodelling agriculture (Gałęski 1973) and was coupled with an exodus from agriculture and the countryside. In Poland, in a centrally planned economy, as a result of some unique features of modernisation ("defective modernisation", Kochanowicz 1988), the transformation of the "peasant class" into the "social-occupational group of farmers" was slow even though it was politically desirable. In the 1960s the professionalisation of peasants was supported by a loosening of the system of compulsory deliveries and the introduction of produce contracting, which tied family farms to the socialist/communist quasi-market. This was a gradual process, and the multitude of features that should describe someone whose occupation³⁵ is that of a farmer meant that it was very hard to estimate how many farm owners could be counted in the "farmer" group. The source of livelihood became the deciding criterion: work on the family farm as the only or main source. Under this criterion, at the turn of the 1980s and

³⁵ "An occupation is a set of actions distinguished within the social division of labour, requiring preparation (qualifications), performed regularly or off and on, and constituting a source of livelihood" (translated from *Nowy leksykon PWN* 1998).

1990s the group of “professional farmers” accounted for about a third or a quarter of rural residents. A further decrease in employment in agriculture occurred in the second half of the 1990s and the following decade. This was also a time of significant changes in the functioning of family farms. Starting from 1990, existing and diverse post-traditional peasant farms were surrounded by the aggressive environment of the market economy. This led to further diversification of farms and farmers: about a third of family farms strengthened their relations with the market, increasing the volume and intensity of production. The managers of such farms could definitely be called “professional farmers”.

ii. The proletarianisation path

Here, professionalisation is understood as the saturation of the rural social structure with social-occupational groups belonging to the labourer category, and involved an increase in the number of peasants who owned a farm but worked outside the farm as well (“peasant-workers”). This community began to emerge in the late 1940s, when urbanisation failed to keep up with Poland’s extensive industrialisation. Peasant-workers were:

an inhomogeneous category, diverse in terms of place and role within the family (head or member), the nature of the work performed (white-collar, blue-collar), the type and place of employment (permanent, seasonal, in industry, in trades, etc.), the area of the farm, the amount of personal income (from the farm, from additional work), the broadly understood conditions of the additional work (qualifications, job position, distance, commuting conditions) etc. (Słabek 2002, p. 77).

The people who sought employment and livelihoods outside agriculture were those who were “superfluous” in the countryside: the landless and owners of farms that were small, neglected or on poor soil, with dilapidated homes and outbuildings. Over time they also came to include owners of medium-sized and larger farms. Besides wages, peasants were drawn to employment outside agriculture by the lack of a proper welfare system for farmers: free healthcare was not available to them until 1972, and old-age pensions until 1977.³⁶

³⁶ These welfare benefits were an important element of professionalisation, making farmers equal to other occupational groups in this respect. The final moment of this “welfare professionalisation” came with the passage, in 1990, of the Act on Farmers’ Welfare Benefits.

The size of this diverse dual-occupation social group changed over time. In 1950, 477,000 agricultural families lived mainly off the head of the family's work outside the farm; in 1960, this number exceeded 600,000, and if we add the non-farm income of other family members it was some 1.4 million. Despite many studies having been conducted, it is hard to estimate the scale of this phenomenon accurately.³⁷ It was certainly a mass trend and, in different forms, occurred in two-thirds of "agricultural" rural households. This community reached its highest numbers and proportion in the 1970s, after which it began to shrink. However, even in the mid-1990s more than 600,000 farmers worked outside their farms, which means that almost a third (31.7%) of "heads of farms" worked outside agriculture.

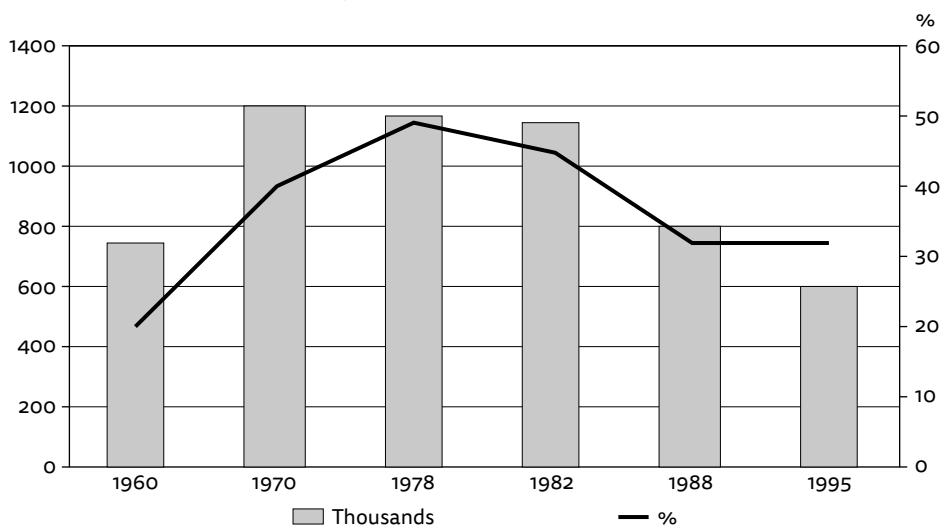


Figure 9.
Peasant-worker population (heads of households) 1960–1995

Source: Halamska, Zwęglińska-Gatecka 2019, p. 226.

The professionalisation of the "peasant-worker" group progressed in a unique way. At first most of those finding jobs outside their farm did not have any vocational training. Most peasant-workers in the 1960s were unskilled labourers. Turski (1964) reported that under 20% of heads of families worked in clerical positions, a third were skilled labourers and almost half were unskilled labourers.

³⁷ This is due to imprecision in the statistics. First of all, it depends on the changing amount of land deciding whether a plot was treated as a farm and the owners as part of the peasantry (cf. Stabek 2015).

My own father was an example of such a peasant-clerk, working in succession as a clerk in the gmina/commune, an accountant at a GS SCh peasant cooperative, and – until his death in 1967 – an accountant at a farmers' association. After my grandfather's death in 1955, my father and mother ran the farm (approx. 4 ha).

Table 4.Evolution of the rural social structure by segment³⁸ 1991–2015 (%)

Segment	1992	2003	2015	Dynamics 1992 = 100
Farmers	46	38	26	57
Labourers	41	36	45	121
Middle Class	13	26	28	215
including: "new"	7	20	22	314
"old"	6	6	6	100

Source: own work based on Polish General Social Survey (PGSS) 1991 data, the Social Diagnosis 2003 and the Social Diagnosis 2015.

Peasants thus mainly added to the labourer segment of the structure. The process of professionalisation was gradual: peasants acquired skills by learning on the job or taking courses. The important thing was being a part of "non-rural" social structures built on the occupational division of labour, where qualifications and skills determined social status. Progressive professionalisation was even confirmed in the nomenclature: peasant-workers were increasingly called "the dual-occupation population".

Peasant-workers started disappearing in the 1990s; in 1991, a quarter of rural residents had peasant-worker sources of livelihood, in 1995 a fifth, in 2003 a tenth. Young people stayed in the countryside as residents but worked almost exclusively outside agriculture. At the end of the first decade of the 21st century, more than 60% of rural households did not own and did not farm land. On the other hand, some peasant-workers transformed into a group not distinguished in the statistics, i.e. "part-time farmers", as indicated

³⁸ The structural segments were formed through the following aggregation of social-occupational groups (according to ISCO08): Middle class: 1. Managers + 2. Professionals + 3. Technicians and Associate Professionals + 4. Clerical Support Workers; Farmers: 6. Skilled Agricultural, Forestry and Fishery Workers; Labourers: 5. Service and Sales Workers + 7. Craft and Related Trades Workers + 8. Plant and Machine Operators and Assemblers + 9. Elementary Occupations + 10. Armed Forces Occupations. In addition, the farmers and labourers segments were reduced by the self-employed, who were added to the middle-class segment.

by many small farms' simplified methods of production³⁹ and the appearance of a group (less than a fifth) of rural households with mixed sources of income. Proletarianisation thus absorbed the largest part of the part-time farmer population in the century under consideration. At the end of the second decade of the 21st century, workers had become the dominant segment in the rural social structure, which means that in the course of the 100 years in question, rural Poland changed from a peasant countryside to a labourer countryside.

iii. The embourgeoisement path

The new path of professionalisation of rural areas is known as embourgeoisement, and involves the rural social structure becoming saturated with people in higher positions in the social class structure, with greater cultural capital, higher income and a non-rural/peasant lifestyle. This process, described in a lot of English-language literature, is also known as gentrification (Hoggart 1997). Henri Mendras (1994) calls the process *moyennisation*, or "middling". In other words, the countryside sees the arrival of a "middle class" that is not a rural phenomenon. It appears in capitalist industrial societies, and grows and changes with their evolution. In today's most developed market societies of Europe (France, the UK, Belgium and the Netherlands) its share in the rural social structure is similar to that in the urban structure. In post-communist Europe, as a rule its share in the countryside is much lower than in cities/towns (Halamska 2015). This is also true of rural Poland.

The origin of this process in Poland can be traced back to the early 20th century, when rather isolated representatives of the intelligentsia appeared in rural areas: the priest and the teacher, then the agronomist and *gmina*/commune official, sometimes a doctor or a none-too-wealthy squire. In the late 1930s "white-collar workers with regular jobs" made up 1.8% of the rural population (Jabłonowski 1937). This community grew in the era of People's Poland and was known as the "rural intelligentsia", although not all its representatives deserved the label, given that Jan Szczepański defined the intelligentsia as:

a set of different occupational categories involved in cultural activity, the organisation of labour and collective coexistence, and in performing work requiring theoretical knowledge. Adopting such a definition of the intelligentsia, we can exclude from the intelligentsia all occupational categories that

³⁹ Of farms up to 5 ha, only 83% were involved in agricultural production in 2010, only 49.8% – in breeding any kind of animals, and almost half declared they specialised in crop production (cf. Halamska 2015).

perform intellectual work in the formal sense of the word, but according to other criteria are not different from physical workers (Szczepański 1960, p. 33).

Zdzisław Grzelak, although aware of this differentiation, did not divide the group in question and reported that “the total number of rural intelligentsia in Poland at the end of 1958 exceeded 215,000: 130,000 clerical workers, 78,000 teachers and 5,300 healthcare workers, excluding veterinarians” (Grzelak 1981, p. 19); the average per *gromada*⁴⁰ was 26–27 people. This whole group comprised white-collar workers employed only in the countryside, and not all rural residents, for instance those employed in such jobs outside rural areas.

The criteria for belonging to the rural intelligentsia were thus not very rigorous, and employees were recruited for white-collar jobs in different ways. They were very seldom people with a tertiary education, and rarely had a secondary education. White-collar workers in those times even included people without a full elementary education. No wonder, when employees were most often sought among “locals”, in one village their previous occupations had been: “farmer on 4.90 ha, farmer on 2.80 ha, cooper-farmer, farmer who also makes money as a cart driver, hired hand at a slaughterhouse, shoemaker, and housewife” (Grzelak *ibid.*, p. 61). This group of white-collar workers grew due to the progressive division of labour, the formation of more and more organisational structures and their bureaucratisation. The level of education also improved, although educated rural youngsters were mostly “handed over to urban areas”, and as recently as the 1980s a return to the countryside, especially with a tertiary education, was often treated as a personal failure (cf. Wasielewski 2013).

Embourgeoisement became statistically visible mainly due to the increasing educational level among the rural population, as education provided the qualifications for jobs considered as middle-class occupations.⁴¹ This process was at its most dynamic over the past 30 years. Its main characteristic is a growing share of the “new” middle class (Table 4). In the early 1990s the share of the “old” crafts and trade part of the middle class was much higher in rural than in urban areas. In 1991 there were 1.5 representatives of the “new” middle class per representative of the “old” middle class, and in 2015 the figure was

⁴⁰ The *gromada* was the lowest (rural) unit in Poland’s administrative structure in 1954-1972; there were 8,121 of them in 1958.

⁴¹ This is evidenced by the pace of growth of the share of people with at least a secondary education in the rural population. In 1960 people with this level of education accounted for 3.7% of the rural population, 5.7% in 1970, 9.8% in 1978, 14.9% in 1988, 26.7% in 2002, and 33.0% in 2011 (Frenkel 2003, 2014).

over three (3.37). The internal composition of the rural middle class was losing its uniqueness and approaching the national average.

The embourgeoisement process had two sources: one endogenous, the other exogenous. The former was the improving education of the rural population, especially the growing share of people with a tertiary education enabling them to occupy higher positions in the social-occupational structure. There was another important element in this process: the migration of educated young people to urban areas was halted. This was due to a number of factors that occurred with varying intensity in the period in question: the transformation-related crisis of the 1990s that led to unemployment, changes in the rural economy and the appearance of new, mainly non-agricultural organisations within it, and improved living conditions in the countryside that made many educated young people want to live there. Studies from the turn of the century show that one in two young educated rural residents wanted to live in the countryside, but over 70% wanted to work in a city/town, since that was the only place they could find a satisfying job and fulfil their career aspirations (Gorlach, Drag, Seręga 2003). This translated into spatial changes in population density in rural areas: communes with a large concentration, also of well-educated people, were located near conurbations, whereas peripheral communes lost residents (Zwęglińska-Gatecka 2020). The exogenous sources of middle-class growth in the countryside included migration from urban to rural areas, as a typical element of rural gentrification. Those migrating from Polish cities/towns to rural areas were mainly young people from the 25–44 age group, with a stable family status, while migrations of older people were relatively rare.

The *Oxford Dictionary of Sociology* defines embourgeoisement as “the process by which bourgeois aspirations, and a bourgeois standard and style of life, become institutionalised among the working class” (Marshall 2004, p. 36). The arrival of people who – based on their cultural resources – assume higher social positions, have greater material resources and pursue a different lifestyle serves to “gentrify” rural communities, which is manifested in two simultaneous processes: diversification and homogenisation (Maloutas 2011). In a way, gentrification, which is associated above all with the migration of the urban middle class to the countryside, which enhances the human, social and cultural capital of rural areas, fills the gap left by the migrations to urban areas that occurred throughout the People’s Poland period and deprived rural areas of the young and the best-educated. The countryside’s social fabric thus underwent recomposition, a process that led to the formation of heterogeneous rural communities which had to organise their social life differently.

3.3. Outcome of the changes

Each of the processes described above developed from the starting point that was the structure of rural society in the pre-industrial stage. In the past, rurality was closely correlated with agriculture, the main sector of the national economy “serviced” by almost the entire rural population. That is why the primary criterion of its social diversity was the fact of owning land and the amount of that land. The industrial stage brought a new criterion of social diversity, which replaced the old one of ties to agriculture. This was occupation. Its spread in the countryside and the professionalisation of rural areas created possibilities to analyse the rural population’s social structure according to the same criteria as were applied to the urban population, which – by the way – meant that the rural population’s uniqueness diminished in favour of universalisation. At the end of the 100-year period under consideration, the social structure of rural Poland is, so to speak, the opposite of the structure of the 1920s: then, seven out of ten rural residents were peasants, now it is less than three; then, three in ten worked in occupations unconnected to agriculture, today it is more than seven. This reversed proportion reflects the social deagrarianisation of the countryside.

Changes in the social-occupational structure of rural Poland were a process that began from changes in agriculture, which resulted in a peasantisation that was substantially delayed compared to Western Europe but quite typical for Central Europe (Roszkowski 1995). It was interrupted by the collectivisation of agriculture begun in 1949; although this was abandoned in Poland, it affected the whole decade of the 1950s. The process in which the share of those employed in agriculture decreased started in the 1960s but did not accelerate significantly until the 1990s, when post-communist agriculture and family farms had to submit to market-economy rules. Depeasantisation, which began in the 1970s with the abolition of compulsory deliveries from private farms, was a major element of these changes.

Another trend in the changing social-occupational structure of rural Poland was triggered by industrialisation and was manifested in the professionalisation of rural areas. First, proletarianisation of the structure occurred; the share of labourers in the rural structure grew steadily until recent years, and labourers became the dominant segment of this structure; a “ruralisation” of labourers even took place, as the countryside became more saturated with labourers than urban areas. Changes in the structure of the whole economy and its transition to the post-industrial stage resulted in the next process:

embourgeoisement of the rural social structure, an increase in the middle class in a broad sense, i.e. people with higher positions in the social hierarchy. This process intensified in the last decade of the 20th century, when an increase in the share of the middle class in the rural population was caused by both the improving education of indigenous rural residents and the influx of the urban middle class to rural areas.

These changes progressed differently in Poland than in the other Visegrád countries. I see two factors here. The first is a greater share of agriculture in the inter-war period: in 1931 in Poland, 67% of the working population was employed in agriculture, in Hungary 53%, in Czechoslovakia 37%. Little changed over the next 20 years; after this period, the share of those employed in agriculture was 56%, 50% and 39%, respectively. This occupational structure provides indirect information on the level of industrialisation in these countries, i.e. – given that the national borders were closed at the time – local capacities for absorbing surplus labour from agriculture. Roszkowski states that around 1930 there was hardly any surplus labour in Czechoslovakia, in Hungary it was about 500,000 people (approx. 10% of the agricultural population), and in Poland it was about 4.5 million, accounting for 24% of the agricultural population (*ibid.*, Table 12, p. 175). The other factor was the abandoned collectivisation,⁴² due to which the deagrarianisation of rural areas proceeded much more slowly, as the effect of “professionalisation through collectivisation” was negligible in Poland while professionalisation as proletarianisation followed a unique course. It was determined by the emergence of numerous groups of peasant-workers and its long-term reproduction. This path was not necessary in countries where collectivisation of agriculture had taken place. Of course, this affected the genealogy of Central European societies. Domański (1996) writes that having peasant grandparents was the general rule in the biographies of all social groups in Poland, Hungary and Slovakia in the 1990s, while the grandparents of Czech society were more often labourers than peasants. This also applied to farmers: in Poland, 82% of farm owners had a farmer father, in Czechia 50%, in Slovakia 47.6%, and in Hungary 41.7%. Changes in the social structure were strongly influenced by these countries’ different experiences in the second half of the 20th century. First and foremost, there was the embourgeoisement of rural Hungary in a process described as “a silent revolution from below”,

⁴² One of the rational reasons for it being abandoned may in fact have been the enormous group of people superfluous in agriculture, part of that group having “survived” until the (current) Third Republic of Poland.

which began in the late 1970s (Szelényi 1988) and was connected with the economic liberalisation after 1968 and the formation of the “second economy”. In Poland such a liberalisation took place after 1980, whereas despite the revolt of 1968 no such trend occurred in Czechoslovakia.

4. The rural population’s sources of livelihood

The changing structure of the rural population’s sources of livelihood can serve as a synthetic indicator of the changes outlined in the first three sections of this chapter and taking place in a relatively stable population of approx. 15 million people. From the inter-war period to the second decade of the 21st century, the income of the rural population was always lower than its urban counterpart’s, and in fact this was not just a European trend.

This phenomenon, deeply rooted in history, intensified during the period of industrial development that was coupled with processes of rapid urbanisation and deagrarianisation. The direct causes lay in the transformation of agriculture from natural to industrial ... Work in agriculture brought lower income – the pay was worse than in other occupations. In view of the domination of agriculture in rural areas, this translated directly into the income of rural residents ... (Chmielewska, Zegar 2018, p. 111).

In the industrial period, when many rural residents already worked outside agriculture, their lower education meant they occupied lower positions in the employment hierarchy, which also meant lower wages. This began to change in the post-industrial period: as the level of education and qualifications of rural residents grew, they increasingly occupied higher and better-paid positions in occupational hierarchies.

In the inter-war period the incomes of rural residents were much lower than those of urban residents, as indicated by many studies. If we compare the situation of peasants and industrial labourers, then just before the Great Depression (1928–1929) a peasant family’s consumer income was 66% of a working-class family’s. The crisis of the 1930s worsened this relationship. In 1934 the average weekly wage of a labourer was 24.30 zlotys, while a peasant made less than 10 zlotys, i.e. just over 40% of the labourer’s wage; in 1936 this was approx. 55% (cf. Zegar 2019; Żarnowski 1973). It needs remembering that rural residents were an extremely diverse group at the time, with landless farm labourers existing alongside owners of enormous estates.

4. The rural population's sources of livelihood

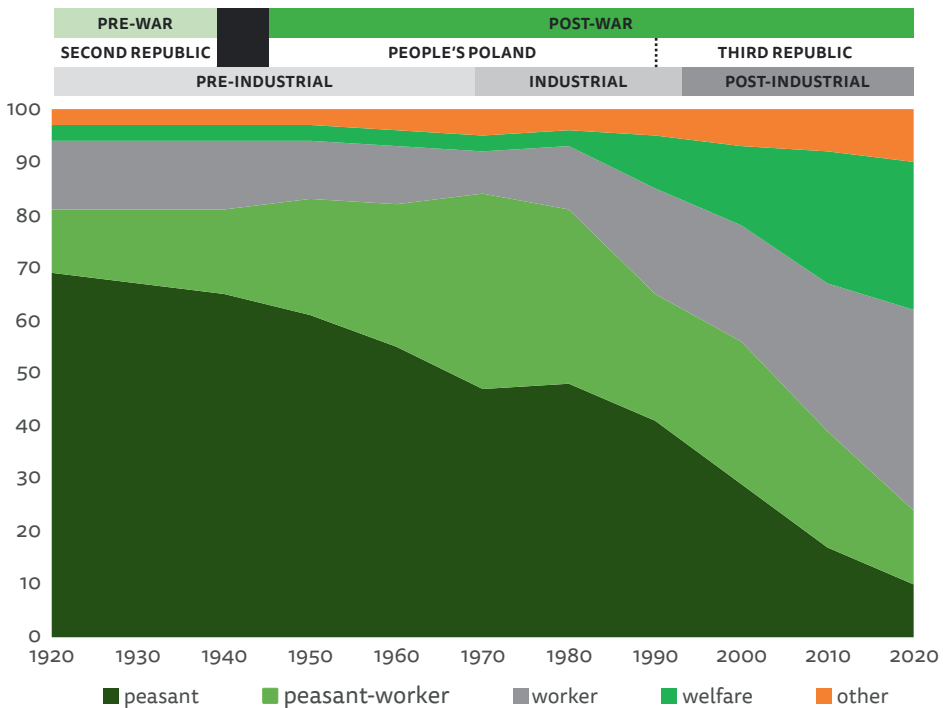


Figure 10.
Model of change in the rural population's sources of livelihood

Source: own work, estimates based on: Jabtonowski 1937 for 1934, Szemberg 1974 for 1972, and Halamska 2017 for 2013.

In the period after World War II the incomes of the dominant rural group – peasants and farm labourers – were always the lowest. From the beginning of the 21st century – due to the launch of EU direct payments – this disproportionate ratio steadily diminished,⁴³ reaching 75% at the end of the period under analysis. The factors in this included progressive deagrarianisation of rural areas and their gentrification: fewer and fewer rural residents made a living from agriculture, and their level of education kept growing. In 2015 the average income of a rural household reached 93% of the national household average, and 75% when counted per capita. Farmer income was much lower: 65% of the average income per capita in Poland and 62% of income

⁴³ Starting from 2004, as a result of the implementation of the direct payment system, farmer incomes grew much faster than the incomes of non-agricultural occupational groups; in 2002–2013 the income growth indicator for farmers was 173, whereas the average for rural areas was 145 (Halamska 2016).

in the “employee” category (cf. Panek, Czapiński 2015, pp. 36–50).⁴⁴ Detailed analyses (Perzanowska 2014) show that in all groups apart from the group of “unskilled labourers” it was lower than income in urban areas.

The incomes of rural residents were strongly influenced by the income structure, above all the share of agricultural income, which is connected with the condition of farms. The low incomes of the majority of peasant families in the inter-war period were the effect of enormous fragmentation of farms as well as of agrarian overpopulation, estimated at 4.5–5.5 million people (Mieszczankowski 1983). This affected the number of people employed per 100 ha of arable land, which dropped several-fold: in the inter-war period, there was less than 1 ha per person living mainly from agriculture, in People’s Poland this was about 2 ha, and today it is 6 ha, but, as Eugeniusz Gorzelak (2010, p. 94) remarks, “these days it would take a dozen or so ha of arable land per person for this income to match income in other social groups”.

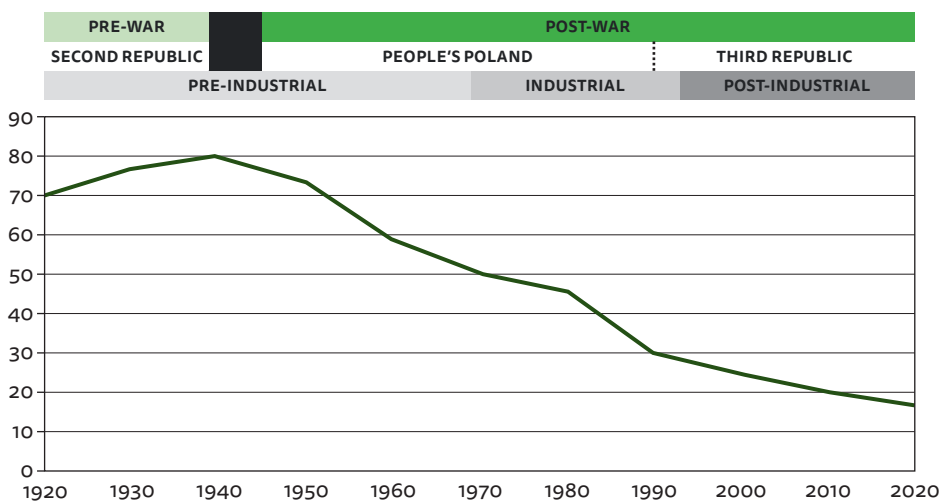


Figure 11.

Evolution of employment per 100 ha of arable land 1921-2015

Source: own work based on Gorzelak 2010, p. 92; Baer-Nawrocka, Poczta 2018, p. 89.

Income in agriculture also depends on the overall economic situation, reflected in the relationship between produce prices and the prices of means

⁴⁴ The income of people working in agriculture is usually lower than the national average. In 1993, according to international studies, it was lower by 12.9% in Czechia, 9.6% in Poland, 12.2% in Slovakia and 19.7% in Hungary. However, the income of people working in transport, trade and personal and social services was also lower.

of agricultural production. An unfavourable ratio means opening the agricultural price scissors. Such a situation occurred during the great crisis of the 1930s and in the 1990s during the economic transformation.⁴⁵ Farmer income dropped massively during the German occupation as a result of levies imposed in 1940, which kept being increased. The next period with comparable consequences was the period of intensive collectivisation, when the intention was to destroy peasant farming financially. Compulsory deliveries, introduced by decree in 1944, were just as ruinous – if not more so – for the peasant economy than the German levies had been. Farmers saw a slight improvement in their income situation after 1956 and the reduction in compulsory deliveries, and substantial improvement after these were abolished in 1971.

The December events⁴⁶ of 1970 were followed by decisions aimed at improving the economic situation of agriculture and increasing the income of the agricultural population: compulsory deliveries were abolished, prices were raised, which improved the profitability of agricultural production, the scale of tax progression was reduced In the times of a command economy the state played a decisive role in shaping agricultural income. The fundamental instruments determining the income-generating factors were controlled by the state: agricultural prices, 'financial charges' imposed on agriculture, loans, and even production volume (through the system that supplied farmers with means of production as well as the contracting and procurement system) (Zegar 2019, pp. 897–899).

A significant improvement was brought by Poland's European Union accession in 2004, mainly due to transfers from the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP): today these account for over 40% of agricultural income. Between 2004 and 2016, farmer household income grew by 113% and the average household income by 101%. However, farmer income is still lower than the average income of households overall.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ In the early 1990s the state temporarily withdrew from subsidising agriculture. The situation was additionally aggravated by the opening of the market and an uncontrolled influx of subsidised food from the West. The average consumer income of farmers compared to the income of hired workers in the national economy dropped from 70% in 1986–1988 to 48% in 1992–1994 (Gorzela 1998, p. 29).

⁴⁶ The December 1970 events were a wave of worker protests on Poland's Baltic coast, which in Gdańsk resulted in 58 workers being killed. The political result of the revolt was a change at the top rungs of power, including the replacement of Władysław Gomułka by Edward Gierek as first secretary of the Polish United Workers' Party (PZPR, the ruling communist party).

⁴⁷ However, this excludes some generous welfare transfers like negligible retirement and health insurance premiums, and the fact that most farmers do not pay personal income tax but only the much lower land tax.

The standard of living of farmers was strongly influenced by the development of the social security system. Until 1962, farmers did not have the right to welfare benefits; that year, farmer families gained the right to voluntary social security coverage. From 1968, if there was no successor, farmers transferring their farm to the state could receive a pension and other benefits in return. As of 1 January 1972, they received the right to free healthcare, and in 1977 the first law on farmers' retirement was passed (later amended many times). A distinct retirement system, separate from the general social security system (ZUS), was set up and financed from a separate fund (KRUS) 90% covered by the state budget.

In cases of illness, especially if hospital treatment was necessary, families faced dramatic choices. I remember that a friend of my grandfather's from his time as an emigrant in France died in 1954 in great suffering because he could not afford to go to hospital. A year later, the hospitalisation, surgery and then months-long treatment of my grandfather almost ruined the farm.

Poorness has had a constant presence in rural areas⁴⁸ and continues to exist there today. Poorness is a relative concept, whereas the term poverty describes a situation in which income is below a strictly defined line: objective, subjective or relative.⁴⁹ As the standard of living changes, so do these lines: the universal notion of poverty has its historical and culturally defined designates. Contemporary rural poverty has different designates than that of the inter-war period or the 1950s. The designates were different in the last decade of the 20th century than in the second decade of the 21st century. Journalistic reports and scientific analyses of rural poverty in the inter-war period are shocking. Poverty was the worst and most widespread in the Galicia region – the former Austrian partition of Poland. It was caused not only by overpopulation but also by the widespread usurious indebtedness of the rural

⁴⁸ In the inter-war period the best standard of living was in the Czech countryside, comparable to Poland's Wielkopolska and Pomerania regions. The situation in Slovakia was much worse, especially in the eastern regions, comparable to the situation in central Poland. The situation was very bad in southern Poland and the Polish eastern borderland as well as Hungary, especially in the Puszta (cf. Roszkowski 1995, pp. 188-194).

⁴⁹ Poverty indices: living wage line ("minimum of needs recognised as socially justified"), subsistence wage line (satisfying needs that cannot be put off in time, while consumption below this level leads to biological damage; this is extreme poverty); relative poverty (defined by the percentage of the median or average household spending; the relative poverty line is much higher in richer countries than in poorer ones); the official (administrative) poverty line gives the right to apply for benefits or welfare transfers (cf. Szacka 2003, p. 338).

population.⁵⁰ That poverty was manifested in limited consumption: households were modestly, often only minimally equipped with durable goods and clothing, and had a modest or sometimes starvation-level amount of food at their disposal (Curzytek 1928). The extent of extreme poverty in rural areas did not shrink in the inter-war period. The standard of living oscillated around the extreme poverty line. The researcher Janusz Żarnowski (1973) states that in the inter-war period only a small group of rural residents could run their farm freely and satisfy their needs, while the rest were barely able to survive. And although the standard of living of the rural population began improving slightly in the last years before the war (1937–1938), “the war put a stop to that improvement” (Kalinowski 2019, p. 181).

Poverty did not disappear during People's Poland, although its censored analyses were few and far between; obviously, there could be no poverty under communism. The reserves of rural residents began dwindling in about 1949, and areas of poverty grew as a result of high taxes, compulsory deliveries, a growing number of different extra charges (insurance, electrification fees, etc.). There was some improvement after 1956, when the pressure of collectivisation eased. The material situation of the countryside improved and the extent of poverty shrank in the 1970s, during the “golden Gierek era” that rural residents remembered long afterwards. Large areas of poverty were “discovered” in the countryside after 1989; poverty existed not only in peasant villages, but new areas also appeared, primarily within privatised former state-run farms (Psyk-Piotrowska 2004). Studies showed that this new poverty often had old roots (Tarkowska 2000): it existed on manor farm estates, then on state farm estates, only to reveal itself again on post-state farm estates. In such cases one can speak of a culture of poverty passed on from generation to generation, or about inherited poverty. Looking at the past 30 years, the disposable income of households grew in both urban and rural areas, but was lower in the latter. The share of food spending in household budgets also decreased, which is a widely used indicator of the growing wealth of societies; in rural Poland

⁵⁰ “The deteriorating economic situation of the population was conducive to incurring debts, which ultimately hindered agricultural development and escape from the spiral of poverty. In 1927 the level of debt per hectare was 159 zlotys, in 1931 it was as much as 336 zlotys and dropped slightly in 1936, to 245 zlotys per hectare” (Mieszczankowski 1963, p. 141). “These debts comprised bank loans taken out for the purchase of land as well as loans from private individuals, and also the repayment of debts owed to the [former] partitioning countries’ loan institutions, converted into Polish zlotys. State and local-government taxes were another significant burden. In 1928 land taxes put a burden of 70 million zlotys on rural areas, while local-government taxes accounted for another 40 million zlotys. The difficult situation was exacerbated further by debt collection costs (costs of sequestration and auctions)” (Kalinowski 2019, p. 174).

in 2016 it stood at approx. 25%, although it had almost reached 50% in 1990. It was a fifth higher than in urban areas.

The material situation of rural residents, including farmers, has unquestionably improved significantly over the past three decades. All the time, however, rural Poland appears poorer than urban Poland, despite the costs of living being considerably lower. This is suggested by many indicators: a greater threat of poverty or social exclusion and threat of relative poverty, a higher share of rural households in the poorest group. However, this is no longer translating as strongly into deep material deprivation: in 2016 its index was lower in rural than in urban areas.

5. The rural population: rhythm(s) of evolution

Describing the population changes in rural areas, one cannot ignore the changes occurring in society as a whole. And Polish society went through universal processes typical of societies at a given stage of development; in our case these were processes of catching up with more developed Western societies. These were mostly strictly demographic: average life span, natural population growth, and consequently the emergence of a unique set of particular demographic indices that enable us to speak of the first or second demographic transition. Compared to developed European countries (the centre), they appeared later in Poland (the periphery), usually first in urban areas and then in the countryside. Rural Poland was thus “doubly delayed” in relation to the centre. Some changes, population loss and migrations above all, were the result of 20th-century geopolitics in the European peripheries, i.e. Central Europe. Poland regained its place on the political map and new nation-states were formed after the disintegration of Austria-Hungary. After World War I, migration in this part of Europe was relatively low.

World War II had a much greater impact. Due to wartime losses⁵¹ and changed borders, Poland’s population decreased between 1938 and 1946 from about 35 million to 24 million, and the rural population from about 24 million to 16 million. At the same time, 1944–1950 saw massive migration: displacements, resettlements and repatriation, which affected about six million people at the time.⁵² From 1950 the rural population remained stable

⁵¹ Wartime losses (deaths) were estimated (1951) at about 5 million citizens, of whom 2.7–2.8 million were Polish citizens of Jewish descent.

⁵² Estimates based on: *Zarys historii Polski w liczbach* [Outline of Polish History in Figures] (GUS 2012); cf. also Foucher 1995.

at about 15 million, but its share decreased gradually from 60% to 38%. All of the natural rural population growth was absorbed by cities/towns. This rhythm of Poland's deruralisation was determined by the economic policies of People's Poland, particularly the extensive "socialist", i.e. communist, industrialisation⁵³ that urbanisation could not keep up with. Implementing this type of policy, the authorities mainly funnelled funds into the development of means of production, reducing the costs of labour and its reproduction to a minimum: economising on building housing and urban infrastructure and on wages for peasant-workers. Rural Poland, like the former colonies of the centre countries, was a source of primitive accumulation in the initial period of communist Poland.⁵⁴

Changes in the employment structure that were universal in the developed world also came to Poland with some delay, even compared to Central European countries. One important reason for this was the abandoning – why is not exactly clear – of the collectivisation that brought about the depeasantisation of rural areas in the other countries of Central Europe (besides Yugoslavia). In Poland this process took place in stages. Stage one, which Jacek Kochanowicz (1988) called the non-capitalist modernisation of agriculture, brought technicisation, blocking changes in production structures and systems of values. The figure of the "modernised peasant" appeared, who only turned into a professional farmer during the post-communist transformation. The paths of professionalisation of the rural social structure were different. They were largely the effect of transformation of the economy, but their pace and direction were determined by political and administrative decisions. This is why their course was different from that observed in developed Western countries, which began 100 years ago from a different level of development and did not have a "socialist" episode lasting almost half a century in their histories. It was also different, however, from the rest of the region, i.e. Central Europe. The deagrarianisation of rural areas was gradual and two-stage. Its slow rhythm until the 1990s was connected with the fact that part-time farming was so

⁵³ Szczepański (1973, pp. 18–27), referencing Clark Kerr and John T. Dunlop (1960), analyses the special character of communist industrialisation and lists a set of social and political factors (ideologies) to which economic processes are subordinated. The methods of obtaining resources for industrialisation and the way they are used are also unique. Communist industrialisation had its own peculiar logic. As Szczepański writes, "Socialist [i.e. communist] industrialisation means the expansion of industry as an important factor of expanding the nationalised and planned economy, in accordance with the ideological vision of a socialist society defined by the principles of Marxism-Leninism" (Szczepański 1973). Szelényi (1983) highlights a different aspect of communist industrialisation: under-urbanisation.

⁵⁴ Urbanisation, understood as migration from rural to urban areas, was also made difficult through administrative means; this applied especially to the biggest cities.

widespread. As a result the 1990s – the period of post-communist transformation – saw an accumulation of processes of change: depeasantisation, proletarianisation and embourgeoisement observed simultaneously. This is not the only peculiarity compared to universal changes in the rural social structure. De-industrialisation was in progress across the economy as a whole, due to its transformation and shift to the post-industrial stage. This means that the flow of migrants out of agriculture did not aim for large industrial plants – as had been the case in the 1960s and 1970s – but a large group sought jobs in the third sector, which was dominated by small and medium-sized enterprises. The uniqueness of this process in rural Poland was determined not just by a time delay compared to the West, but by the overlapping of processes that had occurred successively there, and also the fact that the deagrarianisation of rural areas was coupled with tertiarisation – the stage when the third sector starts to dominate – and not with the previously usual industrialisation of the economy.

2. THE RURAL ECONOMY: FROM AGRICULTURAL TO MULTIFUNCTIONAL

In the 1920s the wheat yield per hectare was 11 quintals, in 2018 it was 49 quintals.
How did this come about?

One of the sociological definitions of the economy describes it as “a subsystem of society that enables material needs to be satisfied”, and “among the types of economic activity, those most often mentioned are: production, distribution, exchange and consumption” (Koźmiński 1998, p. 247). The adjective “rural” comes from the territory where this system functions, i.e. rural areas.

In the simplest terms, it is the entirety of economic activity located in rural areas. The rural economy comprises registered and unregistered entities in the form of both natural persons and organisations (enterprises). Farms have been and are an especially important form of entity in the rural economy; agricultural activity is therefore a symbol of this economy (Wilkin 2019, p. 842).

1. The rural economy, or...

The rural economy at the end of the second decade of the 21st century was a very complex system. Agriculture, even though it defined the character of rural areas, was not the only production activity, and the rural economy became deagrarianised over time.⁵⁵ Alongside agriculture there were many other, non-farming-related businesses dealing with manufacturing and services, satisfying the needs not only of the rural population, which, incidentally, was very diverse. Matteo B. Marini and Patrick H. Mooney (2006) note that the term can only be treated as an ideal type, an analytical construct thanks to which we can show the complex rules of this economy and pose a number of questions about the future.

For many centuries agriculture was the basis not only of the rural economy but the economy as such. From the time of the industrial revolution in Europe, starting from its Western core, family agriculture gradually

⁵⁵ Based on Jerzy Wilkin (2019, p. 843), we can list the following manifestations of this process: a decrease in the share of those employed in agriculture, a decrease in the share of agriculture in the global product and a decrease in the share of agricultural income in the incomes of the rural population.

became widespread.⁵⁶ It was here that the fundamentals of the theory of one of the variations of this economy emerged at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, i.e. the prevalent peasant economy.⁵⁷ Analyses in the spirit of this theory resulted in some idealisation of the village community, about which rural sociologists wrote that it fulfilled “economic functions”. Characterising the economic functions of the village community, Bogusław Gałęski perceives it in terms of a community of “homogeneous units” – “families running peasant farms ... [where there are also] elements of the division of labour and a more or less enduring exchange of products and services” (Gałęski 1966, p. 97). It featured traditionally defined forms of cooperation, regular and occasional team work, safety functions, and also – rare and weak – contacts with the outside world. In a model simplification, the peasant economy in a pre-industrial society constituted a whole, enclosed within the village community which had few ties connecting it to the surrounding society. In reality this economy was not the only economic system in the “rural areas” of the period: alongside it – not only in Poland – there were also large landed estates where different rules of economic activity applied. The peasant economy and the manor-farm economy were complementary structures.

In the euphoric period of industrial society’s development, characterised by the rapid development of industry and increased industrial production, which was followed by the concentration of the population in urban areas and an exodus from the countryside/agriculture, rural areas were perceived almost exclusively through agriculture. Analyses of the rural economy basically came down to analyses of agriculture, of the functioning of different types of farms and their institutional environment. This was agriculture gradually being incorporated into national economic systems, and it constituted an element closely integrated with the rest of the economy, above all with industry. As international exchange developed, it became increasingly subject to global influences. During this period agriculture itself developed extremely rapidly, changing its production structures, intensifying and becoming industrialised. There was enormous progress in agricultural sciences. Agriculture was

⁵⁶ Family agriculture is agriculture based on production units (a social form of production) in which land, means of production and labour are connected with the family, which means that the goals and evolution of farms are linked to the cycles of family development. For more, see sections 3.1 and 3.2.

⁵⁷ First and foremost, we need to mention the achievements of Russian scholar Alexander Chayanov (1888–1939) (Chayanov 1966), who wrote that peasant farms based on family labour strove to earn an income and not make a profit, and to maximise the employment of all the family members, while a farm’s development depended on the family’s development cycle. He pointed to the inseparability of economic and social aspects, which made this form of production unique and impossible to describe in terms of classical economics (cf. Czyżewski, Kułyk 2015).

subordinated to the principle of economic growth. This process continued until the “postmodern breakthrough” (Gorlach 2004), when many earlier trends changed direction while the rural economy stopped being identified solely with agriculture.

In post-industrial society the rural economy became an extremely complex system that was difficult to analyse. First of all, it was no longer a homogeneous system, in two senses: it comprised agricultural and non-agricultural production and service business entities; it was a system in which production, distribution, exchange and consumption processes occurred. Secondly, there were many types of rural economy, as illustrated in Fig. 12, also related to that economy’s level of development.⁵⁸

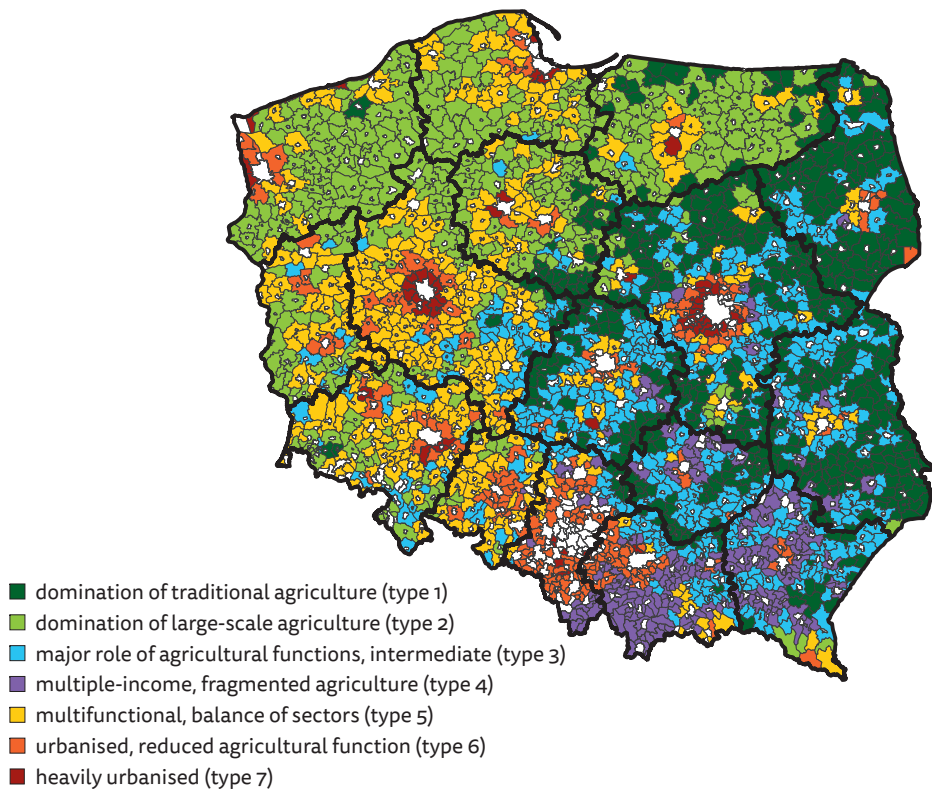


Figure 12.
Communes (*gmina*) by type of rural economy

Source: Rosner, Stanny 2014, p. 226.

⁵⁸ For a more extensive discussion, see Rosner, Stanny 2014, pp. 23–237.

In view of the complexity of this economic structure, it will be analysed in its two traditional segments: agricultural and non-agricultural. I am aware, however, of the existence of many ties, mutual influences, interferences and synergies between these segments. Furthermore, I will pay special attention to the changing institutional environment of this economy, as “efficient institutional adaptation, consisting in the formation of new institutions, modification of existing ones, improvement of their cohesion and complementariness – is a condition of the development, or at least the survival, of societies and economies” (Wilkin 2019, p. 853). In Poland we can distinguish four main waves of institutional reform, namely:

- The building of the Polish state after 1918 – creating the foundations for an independent state, uniting its three parts into a single legal and functional system. This system, based on the constitution, had to be constructed and also adjusted to the new international circumstances that emerged after World War I.
- The thorough transformation after World War II, which also brought changed borders. In conditions of enormous war damage “began the formation of the institutional foundations of a socialist [communist] state, including a nationalised, planned economy and authoritarian government. This system survived, albeit slightly modified, until the end of 1989” (ibid., p. 854).
- The post-communist transformation. “The features of the new political and economic order included basing the economic system on market mechanisms, privatising most of the production assets, opening up the economy to international contacts and competition, and building the foundation of a law-governed state and parliamentary democracy” (ibid.).
- The restructuring of the institutional system of the state and the economy – after Poland joined the European Union in 2004 – and their adjustment to the EU’s political standards and its single market. This stage also involved the formation of institutions implementing EU common policies, including the Common Agricultural Policy so important for rural areas.

In summary, the evolution of the rural economy was influenced by two kinds of factors: the stages of development of the whole of the Polish economy from pre-industrial to post-industrial, and changing institutional frameworks that did not coincide with those stages. Agriculture had a key place in this, as the former type defined agriculture’s place in the economy while the latter defined the rules according to which it operated in the economy. These factors

are a special focus of this analysis. Similar main waves of institutional reform can be distinguished in Hungary and Czechoslovakia. In the latter – split into Czechia and Slovakia in 1993 – the transformation in the new states had some of the elements of Poland's first stage of building an institutional system.

2. Agriculture: its development and changing functions

Agriculture, as everyone knows, has unique features stemming from the character of agricultural production. So what does production in agriculture consist of? How does a farmer produce goods? "The production process takes place in the organisms of living beings, namely plants and animals, while the role of humans as the formal producers comes down to creating the best possible conditions for the living beings to want to develop, reproduce and gain weight" (Manteuffel 1987, p. 10). The essence of this uniqueness is reflected in the Polish saying that "the peasant sleeps and his crops grow". The role of humans is not only about creating the optimal growth conditions for the organisms in question, but has involved and increasingly involves interference with and genetic modifications of those organisms, and even the development of new species and varieties. This approaching biogenetic revolution creates problems not just of an ethical but also a legal nature. The latter include determining the ownership rights to a newly developed organism.

2.1. Land: object of desire and factor of social distinction

So far, agriculture has not existed without land, soil and space. But treating land exclusively as the fundamental means of production would be completely wrong, as "the emotional and reflective sphere built around it has turned into a kind of theology of land, lending land a sacred aspect" (Myśliwski 2004). Besides its economic aspect and importance, land had added value in a myth rooted in the peasant and landed-gentry environment. This myth was articulated at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries by the burgeoning intelligentsia with landed-gentry origins.

Since this intelligentsia of gentry origin had lost all hope of regaining their land, they started transferring their longings to the peasant class, new in the sense of owning the land, and attributing their own aspirations and their sentimental attitudes towards the land to the peasants. ... In genuine folk songs, there is no theme of "love of the land". Land was perceived as

protection, a safeguard against hunger and extreme poverty (Manteuffel 1987, pp. 56–57).

As Manteuffel continues, land was the “nourishing mother”, the value binding peasant culture together. In pre-industrial society it was a factor defining the owner’s social status not only in the countryside but in the whole of society. Land in those times was the foundation of the social structure and stratification; despite a significant decrease in its importance (above all, being stripped of the accompanying myth), to this day it is a factor of social distinction. In the past, as the basis of the division into social classes and strata, it carried enormous political importance and was the subject of social struggles and political decisions.

As the FAO declaration for World Soil Day 2015 states, “Land, soil is, in principle, a non-renewable resource, although humans can influence its quality”, and its protection “is the foundation of food security” (translated from Wilkin 2019, p. 852). The amount of farmland in Poland shrank over the past century. In the inter-war period it accounted for 67.5% of the country’s area, in 1946 it was 65.4%, and 46.4% in 2016; the process of elimination of agricultural land accelerated in the 1960s and at the start of the 21st century.

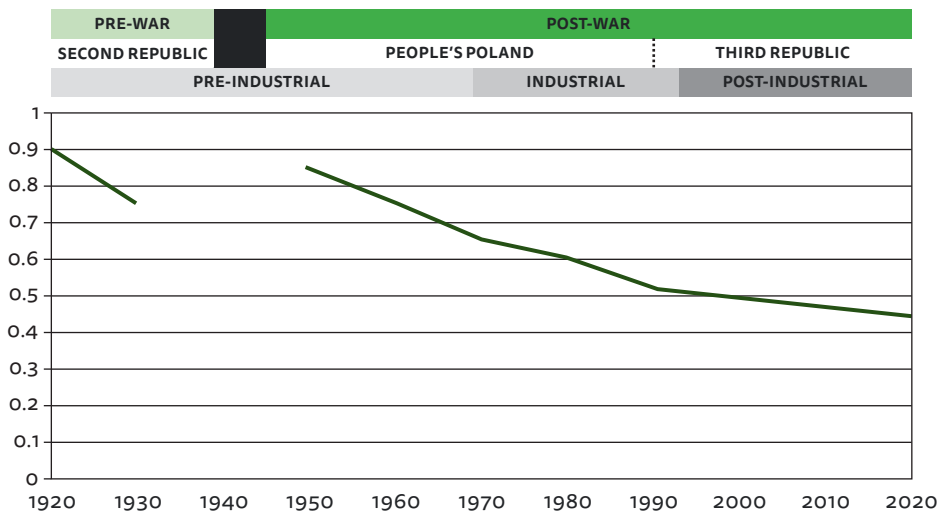


Figure 13.
Farmland in hectares per resident of Poland 1918–2015

Source: own work based on Zegar 2019.

Calculated per resident of Poland, this decrease was radical: in 1946 there was 0.85 ha of farmland per resident, in 1975 it was 0.56 ha, 0.45 ha in 2000 and just 0.38 ha in 2015. This suggests wasteful management of farmland, for which there were many reasons: farmland was absorbed by the country's industrialisation and urbanisation, and less fertile land was converted into forest. In addition, there was a growing amount of abandoned land and land no longer used agriculturally, and also land that was poorly managed as a result of neglect in planned organisation of rural space, resulting in irrational building development.⁵⁹ The importance of agricultural land changed over the course of 100 years: its original multifunctional character underwent substantial transformation. Due to the accessibility of other sources of livelihood, it was definitely stripped of the nourishing-mother myth. If land was the basis of peasants' independence and a symbol of economic freedom (which in fact was quite limited) in People's Poland, the market economy of the Third Republic led to its commodification. To different groups, not just farmer entrepreneurs but also speculators, land became an object of desire but very seldom an object of sentiment. However, such sentiment still existed, especially among the older generation. In countries which had experienced collectivisation, on the other hand, land was stripped of the attribute of family heritage. Even regained ownership as a result of de-collectivisation did not mean the regaining of a localised heritage.

This sentiment issue is rather complicated, however. My brother, who took over the farm and was a teacher at the Agricultural High School in Czernichów, was always a part-time farmer. Now, because of health problems, he cannot run even this small farm. The land is cultivated by other farmers. Some time ago (two, maybe three years), he told me: "You know, Gosia [his wife, born in Cracow] suggested we sell this land". I was surprised because such a thing had never crossed my mind. It would have been a rational decision in every respect: both are nearing retirement age and their only child is about to graduate from the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw and shows no inclination either for agriculture or even for the countryside. I, however, started coming up with various reasons why this suggestion seemed less and less rational to me: who would buy the land, how much could it be worth etc.? Together with my brother, we came to the conclusion that it was not a good idea; operation "sell the land" did not come to fruition.

⁵⁹ A similar trend – diminishing farmland – existed in other countries as well. In Hungary, for example, the share of arable land in farmland decreased from 59.4% in 1950 to 50.7% in 1995, while the share of wasteland doubled to 15%.

2.2. The state and agriculture: building and modifying the agrarian system

As Fernand Braudel (2006) writes, European civilisation is wheat-based. From the 18th century its European core⁶⁰ became dominated by a unique form of production organisation: the family farm, its archetype being the peasant farm. Its model form developed in Denmark where this form of agriculture emerged in 1798 with the abolition of feudal payments and their replacement with lease rent. As early as 1788 the public bank started offering agricultural loans for peasants to buy land, and in 1814 the government instituted an obligatory school system and developed a network of agricultural schools. In the mid-19th century the state supported the formation of a cooperative banking system. One important feature of this model of agriculture appeared as a result of the crisis of the 1880s caused by the influx of cheap grain from the United States. Denmark decided on developing livestock production for export, which was much more profitable for family farms than crop production. The buyers included rapidly developing industrial regions in the United Kingdom and Germany. As a result of this decision agriculture developed extraordinarily well between 1870 and 1914. This path was followed by the Netherlands first, then by France and western Germany. The Danish model involved agriculture based on high-yield family farms, and its spread in Europe had its national variations. Claude Servolin indicates that this was the development of “a completely new type of agriculture, entirely tied to the development of capitalism” (Servolin 1989, p. 37). After World War I this model of agriculture started spreading across Central Europe, to Czechoslovakia, Poland, Hungary and other countries in the region, the prelude to this being agricultural reforms (cf. Roszkowski 1995). I propose that we look at the 100-year evolution of Polish agriculture through the Danish model, as it was around family farming – the strengthening or weakening of its position – that the formation of the agrarian system was focused. The fact that elements of this model were used during the development of the Common Agricultural Policy, whose main institutions Polish agriculture adopted “directly” in recent years, is an additional argument here.

The Polish state in all its forms after 1918 also shaped the agrarian system, the institutional framework for the functioning and development of agriculture. Its main elements regulated:

⁶⁰ According to Samuel P. Huntington (2000), this comprises France, Germany, Italy and the Benelux countries.

ownership rights to land and other means of production in agriculture; a prescriptively defined scope and forms of state interventionism in agriculture, including regulation of the agricultural market and public agencies appointed for the purpose; organisational-legal forms of agricultural operations [social forms of production organisation – M.H.] and ties between agriculture and other segments of the economy and the state; the scope of farmers' self-organisation (Wilkin 2019, p. 855).

Shaping the agrarian system, the state thus had to:

- define the type of ownership in agriculture (land and other means of production) and the preferred type of social forms of production organisation that state policies would support;
- specify the scope of intervention and create the appropriate system of tools for exerting its influence;
- indicate the character of relations with agricultural producers, including creating possibilities for self-organisation.

Let us look at the evolution of the agrarian system in Poland through these three elements.

2.2.1. Land ownership and social forms of land use

The issue fundamental for every agrarian system is that of land: its ownership structure and its forms of use, i.e. social forms of production organisation. In the case of Poland, throughout the century in question there were two main forms of production organisation: family farms and large-scale farms. The difference was not only in the land area but, above all, in social organisation. A family farm is a production unit (social form of production) in which the land, means of production and labour are linked to the family. All definitions of a contemporary family farm invoke Alexander Chayanov's concept, who in the early 20th century described family agriculture as "forms of agricultural production organisation characterised by (i) organic ties between the family and the production unit, and (ii) using only familial labour, and excluding the use of regular hired labour" (CIRAD 2013, p. 10). This means a close connection between the social (family) and economic (farm) spheres. The result is substantial flexibility in a family farm's functioning (financial "transfers" between the family and the farm, the possibility to reduce/expand consumption or accumulation, possibilities for financial manoeuvring that reduces farming risk), offering significant capacity for adaptation to changing social

conditions and also for resisting change. There are different types of family farm: at one extreme of the continuum are peasant farms, and at the other are family agricultural enterprises (Halamska 2014). Usually a large-scale entity, the enterprise in its historically variable forms is based on hired labour, its products are intended to be sold, and its functioning is driven by the goal of making a profit.

Legal instruments from 1919 and 1920⁶¹ and the law on agricultural reform from 1925 mainly aimed to improve the agrarian structure of family agriculture.⁶² “Up to 1938, 2.6 million hectares of land was parcelled out, which meant that the area of large-area (*obszarnik*) estates diminished by 16% while that of peasant farms grew by 14%. The agricultural reform enabled 154,000 new farms to be set up and 503,000 existing farms to increase their area” (Kaliński 2018, p. 123). It improved the area structure of peasant farms only to some extent and did not halt the process of their fragmentation. Support for the peasantisation of agriculture turned out to be rather ineffective. After World War II one of the first laws of the new communist authorities was the 1944 decree on agricultural reform, followed by the 1946 decree on the agrarian system and settlement in the Western Territories. As a result, 6.1 million hectares was parcelled out among 1.1 million families. Peasantisation changed the area structure of farms but was only a political overture to the “repressive tolerance”⁶³ that lasted from 1948 until the end of the 1980s and was the practical expression of official policy towards a family-based agricultural economy. Things were similar in the subsequent Third Republic. At its very beginning, it was decided that state-run farms would be privatised.⁶⁴ The ways in which this would proceed were also specified, and spoke of improving the area structure of family farms as well as preventing excessive fragmentation of well-developed large-scale production structures; despite the declaration on strengthening fragmented family-based agriculture, they fostered

⁶¹ The 10 July 1919 resolution of the Sejm (lower house of parliament) on the principles of agricultural reform and the 15 July 1920 Act on agricultural reform.

⁶² Principles of agricultural reform were also approved in Czechoslovakia and Hungary at this time. In Czechoslovakia the first directive was issued in 1918, and the act on agricultural reform was passed in April 1919. The course of agricultural reform in Hungary was dramatic: the February 1919 reform did not come into effect; the next, radical act was passed in April of the same year but its principles were revoked by the following act, from 1920, on voluntary agricultural reform (cf. Roszkowski 1995).

⁶³ The term used by Krzysztof Góralach (1989) for an agricultural policy that restricted family farming in various ways on the one hand, while tolerating it due to its strategic importance in feeding the country on the other.

⁶⁴ The 19 October 1991 Act on Managing State Treasury Real Estate. Its passage was dictated by political and economic considerations (enormous debts of farms in conditions of inflation and the catastrophic state of the economy).

the preservation of large-scale farms.⁶⁵ This was reflected in the changes to the agrarian structure, which took a dual form due to the presence of very large and very small production structures, starting from the manor farm and peasant farm, to the family farm and the agricultural enterprise. This is a basic division which then determines work organisation and the purpose of agricultural production. This feature also has a political and cultural aspect, being functionally tied to government policies (not just those related to agriculture) and to the Polish social culture built on the old division into lords and peasants.⁶⁶

Statistics from the Second Republic period divide farms into smallholdings and large-scale farms, setting the boundary at 50 hectares of farmland. The same boundary was set (in the Old Territories) by the 1944 decree on agricultural reform; it also seems a sensible figure for analyses of the agrarian structure in the Third Republic.⁶⁷

Throughout the century in question the constant and dominant although evolving form (cf. Fig. 14) was the family farm, often – although not always legitimately – called a peasant farm:⁶⁸ it was an enduring structure.

Observations from the past century show its limited changes, despite the dramatic political and economic events that were plentiful in the 20th century. The share of the smallest farms in the overall number did not change. This is especially powerfully illustrated by the fact that in the years 1918 and 2015 the percentage of smallholding farms (2–5 ha) was identical – almost 33%. During this time, the share of diminutive farms (up to 2 ha) dropped by 11 percentage points but reached 18%. Consequently, diminutive and smallholding farms still accounted for over 51% of the total. On the other hand, positive though limited changes occurred in the group of peasant farms over 20 ha in area. Their share, which was 2.5% in 1921 and just 1% in 1960, grew to 9.5% in 2015 (Kaliński 2018, p. 121).

⁶⁵ It should be remembered that state-run farms were located in the north and west of Poland, whereas the most fragmented agrarian structure was in the south-east. The transfer of land between large-scale and small farms was thus almost impossible. One way out of this was a new colonisation of the Northern and Western Territories, but there were no candidates for potential colonists.

⁶⁶ Keeping to the 100-year timeframe, examples of analyses include those by Chałasiński in the inter-war period (1938) and after the war (1946), and from contemporary research – e.g. Hryniewicz (2004), Leder (2014, 2019) and Sowa (2011). An abundance of examples is provided by literary works as well, which offer multifaceted insights into the problem.

⁶⁷ For some years now (after 2004) the number of farms of 50 hectares or more has been growing the fastest in Poland. These are “parity farms”, ensuring income similar to the national average and having potential for development.

⁶⁸ A peasant farm is one type of family farm, characterised by a unique rationale of farm management. Cf. footnote 3 in this chapter and section 3.3.

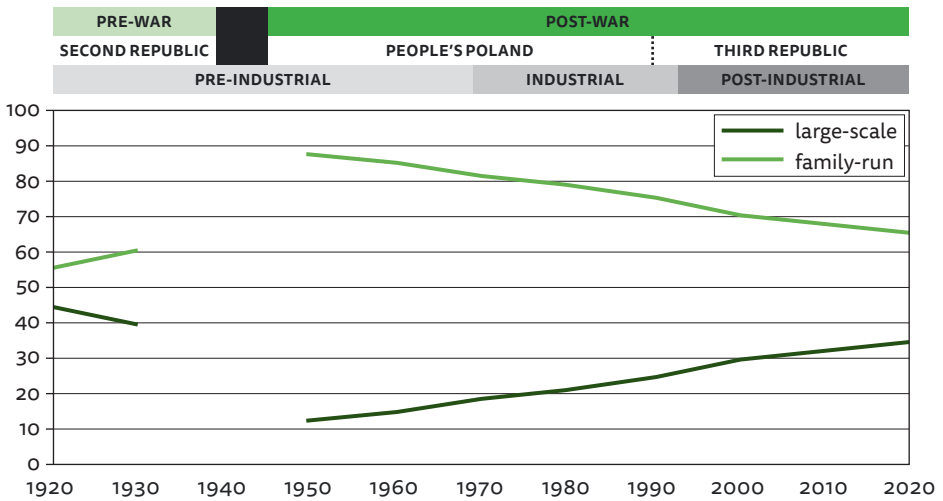


Figure 14. Small farms (< 50 ha) and large-scale farms (> 50 ha) in the area structure in 1921–2015

Source: own work based on Kaliński 2018.

The size of a farm determined the purpose of production: with increasing area, the share of production intended for sale grew while its share intended for on-farm consumption (self-supply) decreased; the importance of the latter gradually diminished.⁶⁹

Table 5. Area structure of family farms 1921–2015 (%)

Farm area	1921	1938	1950	1970	1990	2015
less than 2 ha	29.3	30.7	21.0	33.4	17.7	18.4
2–5 ha	32.9	33.8	33.4	28.4	35.1	32.9
5–10 ha	24.9	23.9	32.9	26.1	29.8	23.4
10–15 ha	10.4	9.5	12.7*	8.7	11.3	10.6
15 ha and more	2.5	2.1	–	3.4	6.1	14.7

* Ten hectares or more.

Source: own work based on Kaliński 2018.

⁶⁹ This depended on the type of farm and type of production. According to Józef S. Zegar (2019, p. 889), in 2014 the share of self-supply was 3.9% in households overall and 24.7% in farmer households.

The large-scale farm sector changed its character and organisational forms twice. In the Second Republic it comprised – privately owned – landowner and *obszarnik* estates of various sizes: from a few dozen to tens of thousands of hectares. In 1921 there were 19,500 of them, and in 1931 there were 16,200 (Żarnowski 1973).⁷⁰ These large-scale farms disappeared after World War II as a result of the radical agricultural reform of 1944. In People's Poland they re-emerged mainly based on large nationalised former German farms in the Western and Northern Territories. State-run farms (PGR) and Agricultural Production Cooperatives (RSP) formed the nationalised agriculture sector.⁷¹ RSPs were established during the intense collectivisation of the early 1950s; most of them fell apart after 1956. The rest (about 1,000 entities) operated on a small amount of farmland (1.2–4%). PGRs⁷² had already started being formed in 1946, and continued on a mass scale after 1949 on land of the State Land Fund (PFZ) created by the decree on agricultural reform. Their share in utilised farmland increased to about 18% at the end of their existence. These large-scale farms changed their structure and organisational forms multiple times. Their gradual concentration began in the 1960s; whereas in the 1970s their average area was 900 hectares, 10 years later it was as much as 3,700 hectares (Kraciński 2013). In the final period of their existence the average area of one of the 1,666 PGRs was a few thousand hectares (Dzun 2014). The next change came in the Third Republic. The 1991 law on the management of State Treasury agricultural real estate abolished PGRs. After restructuring, some of the land was sold to various entities. This process led to the formation of large-scale agricultural enterprises based on purchased or leased land. Some family farms also increased their area,

⁷⁰ "In 1921, estates of over 1,000 hectares accounted for 60.5% of the land under *obszarnik* ownership (according to the terminology adopted by Mieczysław Mieszczankowski). The average estate size in this group was 3,000 ha. The dominant estates were the great estates of magnate families: Zamojski (191,000 ha), Radziwiłł (177,000 ha), Potocki (19,000 ha), Czartoryski, Lubomirski and many other families. These estates were extensive in character, and over half of their area was forest" (Mieszczankowski 1960, p. 21, cited in Wilkin 2019, p. 859).

⁷¹ Simplifying things a little, we can agree that the rhythm of collectivisation in Central Europe was similar in different countries: it began after 1948 and its first stage lasted until ca. the mid-1960s. All these countries saw a temporary retreat in the mid-1950s. The second stage took place in the 1970s and 1980s, when farms in Czechoslovakia, Poland and Hungary sought the most effective forms of operation. This is when a dual – economic and social – model of collectivistic farms developed (cf. Maurel 1994, Halamska 1998).

⁷² "The State Landed Properties (PNZ) organisation was formed in early 1946. Most state agricultural real estate was incorporated into the PNZ. Besides the PNZ, there existed farms that were the property of State Horse Breeding Enterprises (PZChK), which existed before the war, and State Plant Breeding Enterprises (PZHR) formed by a decree dated 8 September 1946. ... On 25 March 1949, through a decision of Minister Jan Dąb-Kociół, the Central Management of State Farms [CZ PGR] was formed" (Kraciński 2013, p. 50).

becoming family enterprises or simply agricultural enterprises. Like a phoenix from the ashes, large-scale farms were reborn in different circumstances and forms; the duality of social forms of agricultural production organisation can thus be considered a permanent feature of Polish agriculture.⁷³

2.2.2. Instruments of state interventionism

The instruments through which the government influences agriculture are based on sanctions in a broad sense, aimed at either stimulating or limiting production and either strengthening or weakening certain social forms of its organisation. This purpose is served by the formation of successive institutions regulating the flow of means of production to agricultural entities and by the rules of their participation in the economy at the start and finish (input and output) of the production process, and also by interference in this process. Some of these institutions are set up by the state, but often the state takes advantage of organisations formed by farmers, sometimes simply taking them over. Let us trace this process.

Throughout the century under consideration an increasing role in agricultural production was played by means of production other than land, i.e. “capital-based” and other means. As the Danish model showed, their transfer to farms was ensured by the state through:

- i) the institution of agricultural loans,
- ii) a network of organisations making up agriculture’s environment,
- iii) improving farmers’ general and specialist knowledge.

i. The institution of the agricultural loan enables the government to support or give preference to certain types of farm or to certain types of agricultural production. In the reborn Poland, the Polish Agricultural Bank (PBR) was set up as early as 1919. Its operations involved providing farms with loans for agricultural investments. They were mainly taken out by larger farms, over 20 hectares. After the great crisis (during which the government implemented a new form of loan, i.e. “down-payment loans” with grain as collateral) it developed loans for parcellation, and from 1935 loans for family payoffs. Parallel to this, the cooperative loan sector developed, mainly serving smallholdings.⁷⁴

⁷³ Hungarian agriculture also has a dual structure, although large-scale farms occupy over 60% of farmland there (Maurel, Lacquement 2020).

⁷⁴ The smallest farms borrowed extensively from usurers for day-to-day expenses. As numerous studies show, diminutive and small farms were in enormous debt (cf. Kalinowski 2019).

This sector comprised different forms of peasant banks and mutual assistance funds. They belonged to all kinds of cooperative associations, which united in 1934 to form the Union of Agricultural and Income-Generating Cooperatives (Majewski 1980). After World War II the PBR's operations were reactivated in 1945; through it, the state financed the agricultural reform, assistance for the rebuilding of damaged farms and the settlement of the Western and Northern Territories. In 1948 it was replaced by the Bank Rolny (Agricultural Bank), whose main task was to provide loans for (and exercise financial control over) investments and production in agriculture and forestry as well as the timber industry. Quasi-cooperative banking started to revive, in 1945–1947 providing production loans to individual (i.e. private) farmers. From 1950 to 1955 these loans were significantly restricted and were provided mainly to the nationalised sector. In 1950, loan cooperatives were organisationally and financially subordinated to the Agricultural Bank. After 1956 the quasi-cooperative banking sector gained a degree of autonomy: the Union of Savings and Loan Cooperatives was founded in 1957. Cooperative banks provided financial services to the rural population and rural institutions, and also had greater possibilities to provide loans for agricultural production from their own funds. The next reorganisation of the lending system was brought by the 1975 banking law: the Agricultural Bank and the Union of Savings and Loan Cooperatives were merged into the Food Management Bank (Bank Gospodarki Żywnościowej, BGŻ). The 1970s brought a significant increase in lending to private farms; preferential loans for the purchase of machinery and other investments were used mainly by “specialist farms”, which were meant to become the production elite of family agriculture in the communist economy. In 1990 the BGŻ lost its function as a central cooperative association. From then on, relations between the BGŻ and cooperative banks were regulated by civil-law agreements on cooperation. Of the 1,663 cooperative banks in operation at the time, 1,276 signed cooperation agreements with the BGŻ. The remaining ones grouped into three other, newly formed associative banks (Rosa 2019, p. 1089). 1994 was important for the subsequent system of lending and financial services for agriculture; this was when the BGŻ launched its cooperation with the Agency for Restructuring and Modernisation of Agriculture (ARiMR). This was an important stage because this is the road by which most domestic and European Union funding for the development of agriculture is channelled. Bank BGŻ merged with BNP Paribas Bank Polska in 2016, forming one of the biggest universal banks in Poland and owned by the BNP Paribas Group, a leading

international financial institution. Similar paths were followed by many agricultural cooperative banks in Western countries.

ii. Forming a network of organisations making up the agricultural environment. In the 20th century agriculture changed from an economy in its own right to a sector of the economy. Its relations with the rest of the economy have therefore been extremely important for its development. Through its initiatives or lack thereof the state could shape these relations at the input end of the production process by influencing the availability of means of production, and at the output end by organising the sales system. Above all, seeking to achieve food security and social peace, the state needed to carefully watch the relationship between the prices of the means of production and agricultural produce, since in a market economy excessively wide price scissors lead to reduced agricultural production and, as a result, to unpredictable social consequences. Similarly, in a situation of over-production the state launches emergency purchases to prevent uncontrolled falls in prices.

In the Second Republic, given the huge importance of agriculture in the economy, the system serving it was rather feeble. The usual places for trading in agricultural products and other goods were markets in 1,328 localities across the country. Markets were divided into small and large, and the main goods traded were eggs and dairy products, poultry, small farm animals and goods made by the local and nearby population. "Large markets ... were held several times during the year" (Majewski 1980, p. 96). The poorly developed network of supply and sales institutions corresponded, firstly, to existing demand for "industrial means of production" and, secondly, to the scale of agricultural production. Demand for artificial fertilisers and machinery was created practically exclusively by large-scale farms and larger peasant farms (owned by rich peasants, mainly in the Wielkopolska and Pomerania regions), while the organised produce-purchase system was essential for farms commercialising their production. It was most needed by larger, medium-holding farms. The agricultural environment comprised mostly small private entities, supplemented by developing cooperative organisations; rural trade was extremely fragmented; larger enterprises accounted for only 15% of existing entities. The produce-purchase network was technically very poorly equipped: silos and refrigeration facilities were lacking, not to mention the extremely bad condition of roads and scarce transport options. A multi-tiered middleman system dominated, which had a negative impact on farm incomes. The grain trade was 75% private while the purchase of livestock and animal products as well

as fruit was almost wholly private. Cooperative entities purchased between 1.5% and 12% of agricultural produce.⁷⁵ Dairy cooperatives developed well, building a network for milk purchasing and processing. A lot of effort was put into unifying the post-partition fragmentation and diversity of cooperatives; the cooperative movement's collaboration with the government was coordinated by the Cooperative Movement Supervisory Board (Brodziński 2010; Majewski 1980; Chyra-Rolicz 2019).

A cohesive, centralised and statist system for the agricultural environment was created in People's Poland. Those original concepts of incorporating private agriculture into a centrally planned economy will be discussed in greater detail. The main element that included private agriculture in the "socialist economy" was compulsory deliveries, which existed right up until 1972 and were an extension of the German quotas from World War II.⁷⁶ The system that was created for the agricultural environment and then reorganised multiple times was largely quasi-cooperative.⁷⁷ Rural agricultural trading cooperatives began operating after World War II, and in 1948 were incorporated into the economic planning system and obliged to join the single Central Cooperative Union, which practically eliminated the autonomy of the cooperative organisations. A special role in this was played by the 1947–1948 "battle for trade", which involved "restricting the role of private trade, making prices and profits regulated by the authorities, reorganising trade cooperatives and forming a network of retail outlets" (Kaliński 2015, p. 182). The cooperative movement, considered an auxiliary form of fulfilling the socioeconomic tasks required by the communist state (cf. Lange 1973, p. 219), was split into an urban and a rural part. The latter was represented by the *Samopomoc Chłopska* (Peasant Self-Help, SCh) universal cooperative organisation dealing with supply and sales, which achieved a monopolistic position in rural areas. The whole of the rural cooperative movement was "tidied up" in 1948 – split into different sectors:

⁷⁵ There were over 400 agricultural trade cooperatives. Those that were general in scope dealt with buying up produce and providing machinery, tools and household goods to farmers. Besides general cooperatives there were specialist ones, grouping producers from a given segment: fruit, vegetables, apiculture, eggs.

⁷⁶ "The essence of compulsory deliveries lay not only in the fact that they were sanctioned by coercion. It also, or maybe above all, meant farmers' obligation to sell the surplus agricultural goods they produced for prices two, three or even four times lower than free-market prices. ... On many farms grain prices did not cover the necessary outlays. In an even more numerous group, prices were lower than the farm cost of production, meaning not only did they not generate an income, but they did not even ensure normal reproduction, eating into farm assets" (Dobieszewski 1993, p. 80 et seq.)

⁷⁷ From 1945 to 1989 the cooperative movement was: "like the whole of the national economy, under state control. It was counted among the nationalised economy's units and included in the performance of tasks listed in national and local economic plans" (Brodziński 2010, p. 98).

dairy, horticulture and apiculture, banking, plus a network of *gmina*/commune Samopomoc Chłopska cooperatives. These commune-level SCh cooperatives collected produce from farmers as part of the compulsory deliveries and – together with the dairy and horticulture-apiculture cooperatives – gradually introduced contracting of specified types of production. In this, they often collaborated with centres for agricultural development. In the 1970s machinery services for private farms were also made part of cooperatives; from 1957 they had been carried out by farmers' associations.⁷⁸ This system gained its final form after the administrative territorial reform of 1973–1975, which unified and centralised the system. Every commune was covered by a local SCh cooperative with its shops, produce collection points and small-scale processing (a bakery, a slaughterhouse etc.), a Farmers' Association Cooperative (SKR) with machine bases providing various agricultural services as well as a cooperative bank. There were also milk collection units (collection points and dairies) and fruit and vegetable collection points, usually operating seasonally. All of these were obligatory members of the appropriate central organisations with their provincial and national structures. Their cooperative autonomy was slight, since prices, profit margins and the scope of operations were themselves specified by the state; even commune-level managers were appointed by the state (thus constituting a local *nomenklatura*). At the end of the 1990s there were 1,912 commune-level SCh cooperatives, 2,006 farmers' association cooperatives, 1,663 cooperative banks, 323 dairy cooperatives and 140 horticulture-apiculture cooperatives (Brodziński 2010, p. 183). This was the web of quasi-cooperative organisations that the real-socialism system created over 45 years to serve/corner family agriculture (and the rural population)

⁷⁸ After the failed collectivisation of 1949–1955, farmers' associations formed after 1957 were an element of "indirect" collectivisation, a concept assuming the nationalisation of all agricultural means of production except land and labour. Among other things, the associations were tasked with the mechanisation of private farming, which was practically deprived of the ability to buy machinery (Halamska 1989). An organised farmers' association, using funds from the Fund for Agricultural Development (FRR), could buy machinery for joint use and then use it to perform agricultural services for farmers (also non-members). This form of "nationalised mechanisation" was effected using farmers' funding, as the FRR was set up in 1959 and amassed funds that were the difference between the prices the state paid for produce provided as part of the compulsory deliveries and free-market prices. The difference between these prices was significant, especially in the 1950s. Dobieszewski (1993, p. 81) writes that the price of a quintal of wheat in compulsory deliveries in 1955 was 97.63 zlotys, and in other sales 322.40 zlotys; the price of pork was, respectively, 6.30 zlotys and 13.20 zlotys. In the 1960s the concentration of equipment from several associations was introduced, gathering such equipment in "inter-association machinery bases" (MBMs), and after 1974 (the reform of the lowest level of administration and the formation of *gmina*/communes) in the wake of political pressure Farmers' Association Cooperatives were formed in every commune.

in the system of the command economy, which according to Janos Kornai (1985) was an economy of chronic shortage.

The evolution of the milk collection system was also distinctive; I observed all its successive stages in Brzeźnica. At first almost every village had a collection point, since milk was also subject to compulsory deliveries. Next, the authorities introduced milk transport by cart to collection points shared by several villages. That is when small benches appeared by the roadsides. If they were used for neighbourly gossip, it was only their secondary function: the original purpose of the benches was for milk churns to be put on them to make it easier for the cart driver to get them onto the cart. In the 1990s the system of milk collection was changed and the obligation to have special refrigerators on farms was introduced, fundamentally changing the structure of dairy farms. In Brzeźnica itself there is not one milk producer left, and I suspect there are no cows, either.

This system fell apart after 1989, chiefly due to the 20 January 1990 law abolishing provincial and central cooperative unions. Members of the quasi-cooperative *nomenklatura* were separated from their organisational and financial base, while existing cooperative entities were unprepared to function on their own in the (unregulated) market economy. For many entities, shifting from a directed shortage economy to a competitive market economy turned out to be a challenge they were unable to cope with. In 2010 there were approx. 1,400 SCh cooperatives left, grouped in nine unions, but their operations had been greatly reduced and in rural areas were largely limited to retail trade. Private agricultural services and more machinery owned by farms marginalised SKRs, with only one in five surviving while also offering many other services. In the transformation period the state left the post-communist cooperative movement to its own devices, failing to appreciate the virtues of cooperatives and not being very inclined to rebuild the movement – actually following the *vox populi* in this (Chyra-Rolicz 2019). Only dairy cooperatives emerged from the transformation with positive results: supported by government and pre-accession programmes, they managed to keep their dominant position on the milk market, expanding and modernising dairy processing and fundamentally changing the milk-producer structure.

A free-market economy needed new regulations. “The whole economy’s growing problems, rapidly increasing inflation turning into hyperinflation and the negative agricultural price scissors accompanying these trends put farmers and the entire foodstuffs sector in a dramatic situation” (Drygas, Nurzyńska 2019, p. 1053). Contrary to the slogan popular at the time – that

the market would regulate everything – in agriculture it became necessary to set up institutions supporting such market-based regulation. The first ones had already been founded in the early 1990s. The Agricultural Market Agency (ARR)⁷⁹ set up in 1990 was a state entity intended to stabilise the market for agricultural products and protect farm incomes. Its main objectives included interventionist purchases and sales of produce and creating reserves. Its tasks evolved and expanded: the agency took part in preparing the Polish market for integration with the EU, and after 2004 it was one of the institutions implementing the Common Agricultural Policy. Next, the State Treasury Agricultural Property Agency (AWR SP) was founded on the basis of a 1991 law to restructure and manage State Treasury-owned agricultural real estate. By 1995 it had taken over all the real estate of former state farms (PGRs) as well as land belonging to the State Land Fund – a total of 4.7 million hectares. In 2003 its competence was expanded to include shaping the agrarian system. The name was changed to the Agricultural Property Agency (ANR) (Kraciński 2013). In September 2017 the ANR and ARR were merged into an institution called the National Support Centre for Agriculture (KOWR). Its tasks include managing agricultural real estate owned by the State Treasury (selling and leasing), transferring land free of charge and providing non-repayable financial aid, overseeing companies of special importance for the national economy, issuing decisions related to private land sales and stemming from the law on shaping the agrarian system.⁸⁰

In the face of growing debt in agriculture, in mid-1992 the government set up the Fund for Restructuring and Debt Clearing of Agriculture, which aimed to facilitate debt repayment by farms and to stabilise the agricultural loan market. In 1994 this fund was changed to the Agency for Restructuring and Modernisation of Agriculture (ARiMR). Over time, the agency became the central element of agriculture's institutional environment. Its structure is hierarchic: it comprises a head office, 16 regional branches and 314 *powiat*/county offices. In 1999, following the decision to make it an accredited paying agency of the EU,⁸¹ it was expanded, employment was increased gradually and staff were sent on training courses. Generally speaking, this institution was

⁷⁹ The establishment of this agency and the subsequent formation of the Fund for Restructuring and Modernisation of Agriculture came in response to waves of farmer protests in 1989–1993 (cf. Foryś 2019).

⁸⁰ The Act of 11 April 2003, as amended ("UKUR").

⁸¹ Spending of EU funding for the agricultural sector takes place exclusively through special institutions called paying agencies, which first have to undergo accreditation.

shaped in the period of preparation for EU accession⁸² and in the first years of membership. From the beginning, it implemented domestic instruments for supporting agriculture. At first these were mainly subsidies to the interest on operating and investment loans provided by the agency as well as banks. In its first ten years the ARiMR issued 300,000 investment loans and over three million operating loans. It also provided loan guarantees, helped rural residents improve their qualifications, granted preferential loans for creating new jobs etc. As of 2004, it is a paying agency of the first and second pillars of the Common Agricultural Policy and the Common Fisheries Policy. Between its inception and 2016 it had paid out PLN 280 billion in total; most of this support came from the EU as pre-accession assistance, direct payments and the Rural Development Programme (Drygas, Nurzyńska 2019).

iii. Improving farmers' general and specialist knowledge is an essential element of change in agriculture. The process by which rural residents' general knowledge improved – from quite widespread illiteracy at the start of the 20th century to secondary and tertiary education at the start of the 21st century – has been described in Chapter 1. Here, I would like to discuss the process of disseminating agricultural knowledge through the agricultural consulting system, “which supports the rural population in overcoming different difficulties resulting from political, economic and social changes” (Jasiński 2019, p. 1145).

Social agronomy developed in the inter-war period, which was also when the foundations of professional consulting were created, based on science and agricultural education, agricultural institutions/organisations and agricultural producers. Different types of agricultural schools and courses were developed intensively from 1920, and a growing number of agricultural instructors with different competences visited farms directly. They were employed by agricultural societies and farmers' associations and chambers, farmers' wives' associations and sector organisations. “The aim of the support provided at this time was also to prepare forms and methods of consulting work (instruction) and to provide institutional support for the development of consulting so that it could become a tool diminishing the backwardness of rural Poland, intensifying plant and animal production and fostering the implementation of agrarian reforms” (ibid., p. 1146).

⁸² A major role was also played by pre-accession programmes (PHARE and SAPARD) as well as the Foundation of Assistance Programmes for Agriculture (FAPA), which existed from 1992 to 2018 and supported the modernisation of Poland's rural areas and agriculture. Its programme evolved over time and adapted to changing needs. Over 600 projects for the Ministry of Agriculture were completed under this programme.

The period of People's Poland was not homogeneous, and many changes were caused by territorial reforms (driven by a search for the best territory for governing) and changing concepts for incorporating private agriculture into the centrally planned economy. In 1945 the minister for agriculture and agricultural reform had already restored some elements of the pre-war system, and after 1956 the reactivated farmers' associations started hiring instructors. Based on this network, the post of *gromada* agronomist was created. In a model approach this person was supposed to implement mechanisation, work to improve the effectiveness of agriculture, influence farmers' attitudes towards innovation and inspire social projects. The post of *gromada* livestock-rearing specialist was introduced in 1963. This system was reformed in 1968: the agronomy and livestock-rearing service was subordinated to local authorities, a move that was meant to strengthen the position of local instructors. A network of Local Agricultural Experimental Units (RRZD) was also formed. This system began to be reformed in the early 1970s and its structure adjusted to the new, two-tier administrative division of Poland in which the basic unit was now the *gmina* (commune).⁸³ The Commune Agricultural Service (GSR) was subordinate to the commune administration. After 1975, when *powiats* (counties) were abolished and 49 new provinces were formed, the decision was made to set up Provincial Centres for Agricultural Progress (WOPR). At the start of the 1980s GSRs were removed from political and administrative control and subordinated to the WOPRs; these centres became the institution responsible for consulting and for agricultural development, including the effective utilisation of scarce means of agricultural production. The next changes came in 1989; in the Third Republic there were three causes for these: political changes, reforms changing the administrative division, and European Union accession. In 1991 WOPRs served as the basis for forming Agricultural Advisory Centres (ODR), whose fundamental aim was "to adjust agriculture – in terms of structure, innovation, technologies used, operations, scale of production – to the needs of a market economy" (*ibid.*, p. 1142). After the administrative reform of 1999, ODRs were subordinated to provincial governors and the National Advisory Centre for Agricultural and Rural Development was created. This structure was maintained after Poland joined the EU. The two latest decisions

⁸³ Communes, entities much larger than *gromada* units, were meant to become strong economic and administrative units with substantial economic independence and a say in their directions of development. They were the basic unit of state administration. Each commune was headed by a prefect. There was also a commune council, which was chaired by the secretary of the commune committee of the PZPR (the ruling communist party) – even if that person was not a councillor – who was the primary figure in the local power structure. Communes became units of territorial self-government in 1990.

changing the ODRs' place in the structure were quite important: in 2009 they were subordinated to provincial level local-government administration, and in 2016 directly to the minister of agriculture and rural development, which turned them into state organisational units with legal-person status.

2.2.3. Changing options for farmers' self-organisation

This section will disregard political parties, even though they had their role – sometimes smaller, sometimes greater – in developing government policies towards agriculture in every period. After the partition era, historically different legal possibilities meant that the peasant and agricultural self-organisation movement left newly independent Poland a diverse legacy. One illustration of this is the federal structure of the Central Society of Farmers' Organisations and Associations (CTOiKR) formed in 1929: it comprised the Central Agricultural Society (CTR),⁸⁴ the Central Union of Farmers' Associations, the Federation of Unions of Agricultural Associations and Organisations of the Eastern Lands, the Central Union of Settlers and the autonomous Central Organisation of Farmers' Wives' Associations.

The cooperative movement was well represented, although conditions for its development had not appeared in the Polish lands until late, i.e. the second half of the 19th century.⁸⁵ In 1914 there were 3,745 cooperatives of various kinds, with almost 1.6 million members. This meant that a tenth of Poland's residents and a fifth of the economically active population were members of a cooperative. Cooperative organisations developed in the inter-war period, forming a single head office in 1934: the Union of Agricultural and Income-Generating Cooperatives (ZSRiZG). In 1938 it "was formed by 5,839 cooperatives, including 3,369 savings-and-loans, 1,245 dairy, 996 trade and foodstuffs, and 229 other cooperatives. They had 1,786,000 members" (Borkowski 1980, p. 298). In addition, there were approx. 1,500 rural cooperatives forming the Spółem Union of Consumer Cooperatives (Bilewicz 2019). Both peasants and land-owners belonged to various agricultural cooperatives. The dominant group (82–96% depending on the cooperative type) were owners of farms of less than 20 hectares. Jan Borkowski estimates that – taking into account membership in different cooperative entities – 1.2 million peasants belonged to cooperatives

⁸⁴ The CTR was formed in the Kingdom of Poland in 1906; after 1918 it was active in nine central and eastern provinces.

⁸⁵ This was due to the late granting of freehold to peasants; in the Prussian partition it began in 1811 and lasted over half a century, in the Austrian partition it began in 1848 and in the Russian partition in 1864.

in 1934, “which means one in three farmers, and later even more, perhaps one in two” (1980, p. 298).⁸⁶

From 1945 to 1989 the statist, centrally planned, politicised and increasingly bureaucratised cooperative movement stopped operating according to its classical cooperative rules and ceased cultivating its cooperative values. Cooperative structures pursued “the general social interest”, not the group interest; they served all of the rural population and membership did not entail any privileges. The mass membership indicated by statistics was not so much passive as an apparent membership. Members had no influence over the work of the basic structures or the head offices. This was the result not only of functioning according to “socialist democracy” procedures but also of the financial independence of the cooperative head offices. This resulted in the alienation of the bureaucratic cooperative structures. Moreover, the image of the cooperative movement was negatively affected by the collectivisation of the early 1950s (which formed “agricultural production cooperatives”) and the purchase of produce by SCh commune cooperatives under the compulsory delivery system. In all, the 45 years of People’s Poland effectively compromised the cooperative movement and its ideas. Although some cooperative business organisations did exist (see above), they “collapsed, and virtually total disintegration of membership ties and loyalty occurred, the member base diminished radically, and the activity of member-users and cooperative self-government was weakened” (Brodziński 2010, p. 474).

Farmers’ associations – local organisations covering one or a few villages – were a widespread rural organisation related to the cooperative movement. They were formed in Polish lands starting from the 1870s – in the Wielkopolska region the earliest, in the Kingdom of Poland the latest. In the inter-war period their members were peasants (90–95%, most from medium-sized farms) as well as landowners and rural intelligentsia, including priests (a few percent each). Their national structure (the Central Union of Farmers’ Associations) was formed from the Central Agricultural Society in 1920. In 1938 there were about 11,000 farmers’ association organisations, with 305,000 members in total. “On a national scale, only one in 10 farmers belonged to the associations ... which suggests they were relatively poorly organised. ... Nationwide, in 1938 a farmers’ association had an average of 28 members” (Borkowski 1980, p. 284).

⁸⁶ Various types of cooperatives also developed in Czechoslovakia. In the inter-war period the number of cooperatives doubled, and in 1937 there were over 11,000 of them, with approx. 1 million members. In 1938 Hungary had two cooperative structures, the Central Cooperative Credit Association and Ant Hangya, grouping approx. 1,500 cooperatives (Roszkowski 1995).

The Farmers' Associations, whose members were peasants and landowners working in agriculture, were corporate organisations. They propagated education, general and specialist knowledge, and promoted innovations: artificial fertilisers, new grain and other plant cultivars, orchard planting etc. Farmers' Wives' Associations (KGW) were affiliated to these organisations; just before World War II they had approx. 100,000 members in over 4,000 associations. They were very often founded and encouraged by landowners' wives, and were involved in propagating education, expert knowledge and farm household skills. In People's Poland, Farmers' Associations were given a new place in the structure of the agricultural environment. Intensely reactivating their operations after World War II, in 1949 they were absorbed by the Peasant Self-Help Union (ZSCh), as were the KGWs.⁸⁷ They were able to renew their activity from 1957, but after the failed attempt at collectivisation they were intended to be an instrument in the "indirect collectivisation"⁸⁸ being considered at the time. With financial support from the Fund for Agricultural Development (FRR) they quickly became a mass rural organisation for mechanising agriculture, even though farmers had some fears, as reflected in a saying coined at the time: "peasant to wheel,⁸⁹ wheel to cart, cart to *kolkhoz* [collective farm]". In 1959 there were already over 21,000 of them, in 1989 over 31,000. Their function changed compared to the inter-war period: they became an instrument of state policy. The state gave them various tasks: mechanising individual (private, family) agriculture, disseminating specialist knowledge and implementing innovations as well as a hidden function – the "nationalisation" of family agriculture. The basic organisations – local farmers' associations – were prevented from influencing their own operations due to the gradual concentration of services in increasingly large organisational structures subject to the rule of the command economy, and also due to their subordination to their own hierarchic structures. From 1974 they were forced to join Farmers' Association Cooperatives, which expanded the aims and areas of their activity

⁸⁷ The Peasant Self-Help Union (ZSCh) was a social and professional organisation of farmers established in 1944 in Lublin following an initiative of Polish Workers' Party (PPR) and People's Party (SL) activists; it was politically and organisationally controlled by the PPR, then by the PZPR communist party; the ZSCh took part in carrying out the 1944 agricultural reform, the settlement operation in the Western and Northern Territories and the attempted collectivisation; it organised SCh cooperatives and cooperative machinery centres in communes; in 1955 it had approx. two million members; it was dissolved in 1957 and its tasks were assumed by farmers' associations (*Encyklopedia PWN*).

⁸⁸ The idea was to leave the land with the peasants and to surround them with various institutions in such a way as to turn farming into a form of outwork (Halamska 1988). In Hungary, pig farming was similarly organised within the private homesteads of peasant cooperative members.

⁸⁹ These farmers' associations are called 'circles' in Polish, the same word – *kółko* – meaning 'small wheel' – translator's annotation.

(including the running of Group Farms, which was a manifestation of indirect collectivisation).⁹⁰ This initiated a decline of Farmers' Associations, which was not even halted when they were granted new, syndicate-like functions in 1981. Membership shrank rapidly from 1989 and the average member's age grew significantly, which was the result not only of the lack of a clear objective and area of activity in the contemporary structure of agriculture but also of the decreased share – by half (cf. previous chapter) – of farmers in the rural occupational structure. Today it is unclear how many members there are in the lowest structures and what their activity involves; there are 14 provincial structures as well as the National Union of Farmers, Farmers' Associations and Organisations (KZRKiOR) (Kamiński, Sitek 2019). The women's branch of the organisation – the Farmers' Wives' Associations (KGW) – flourished during People's Poland. At the end of the 1980s there were over 30,000 KGWs with 1.1 million women as members. They developed very varied activities until 1990. After 1989 they shared the fate of the Farmers' Associations, although there are now some signs of revival (albeit on an incomparably smaller scale).

On the other hand, there was no continuity in farmers' occupational self-government. The Second Republic had chambers of agriculture, established by a directive of the Polish president in 1928. These were described as units of economic self-government and public-legal persons operating in a single province. Membership was obligatory and the chambers were universal, meaning they could represent the interests of all farmers and all of agriculture. Their main aim was to organise the farming profession, and their activity consisted in representing and protecting the interests of agriculture. This competence was expanded in 1932 to include the obligation to work with national and local government authorities on all matters related to agriculture, supervision over *powiat*/county-level local governments' initiatives in this area and preparing opinions on bills concerning agriculture. Chambers of agriculture were organised in 13 (out of a total 15) provinces. They resumed operation after World War II but were abolished by decree in August 1946, their tasks and assets being transferred to the then omnipotent Peasant Self-Help Union (ZSch). They reappeared in the Third Republic thanks to a law passed in December 1995. Their organisational structure is similar to that in the inter-war period: they operate within individual provinces and have an office in every county. The National Council comprises the presidents and delegates of provincial councils. The members are payers of agricultural tax and taxes from special

⁹⁰ Group Farms – production units formed to cultivate land belonging to the State Land Fund (PFZ); they were yet another form of the nationalisation of agriculture.

branches of agriculture as well as members of agricultural production cooperatives. The law states that the chambers work for the benefit of agriculture, have an influence on agricultural policy and take part in implementing it. They also have the right to initiate resolutions and bills. Their funding comes from agricultural tax (2%). These organisations are not popular or valued by farmers, as shown by the low turnout in leadership elections: in the last elections (2019) it did not exceed 4.5%, and in some communes for lack of candidates to the county chambers elections were not held.

Trade unions – also not very popular among farmers running family farms – are a new institution. There was no farmers' trade union in the inter-war period, although there was a Union of Polish Farm Labourers, formed in 1919, for manor-farm labourers only. Employers were represented by the Landowners' Union⁹¹ (Mich 1987). Ludwik Hass (1991, pp. 47–51) states that almost 300,000 farm labourers belonged to trade unions in the early 1920s. The trade union movement weakened in the 1930s: in 1938 it had only 117,000 farm-labourer members. In People's Poland hired labourers in "nationalised agriculture" belonged to the Agricultural Workers' Trade Union until 1981,⁹² and from 1983 to the Federation of Agricultural Workers' Trade Unions. A new Trade Union of Agricultural Workers in the Republic of Poland was formed in 1991,⁹³ among other things invoking the pre-war farm labourers' union. It has just over 20,000 members. Almost parallel to this, in the early 1990s organisations of owners and lessees of large-scale farms created from privatised PGRs (see above) appeared, representing their interests, especially towards the state. In 2003 they formed the thriving Federation of Unions of Employers – Agricultural Lessees and Owners.

The idea of a trade union organisation for farmers from family farms emerged in rural Poland in the late 1970s, when "a small number of farmers demanded the right to set up trade unions" (Kozłowski, Olszszek 2019, p. 629). Thanks to the Solidarity social movement this idea spread in 1980 and, after a year's struggle, a new law enabled the Solidarity Independent Self-Governing Trade Union of Individual Farmers to be legalised; around a million people

⁹¹ Founded in 1915, the Landowners' Self-Help Society was turned into the Landowners' Union in 1916. In 1922 it had over 4,000 members; in the late 1930s approx. 30% of landowners remained outside the organisation. From mid-1919 the union devoted the most attention to agrarian issues, taxes, work conditions and farm labourer wages. Many members collaborated with agricultural societies that also had peasant members (Mich 1987).

⁹² These changes in the trade union structure between 1981 and 1982 stemmed from the suspension of all trade union activities in December 1981 (under the decree on martial law). They were allowed to form again on the basis of a new law on trade unions of 8 October 1982.

⁹³ The reason for the reorganisation was the new law on trade unions passed on 23 May 1991.

joined the organisation. This union did not manage to form its structure or undertake proper trade union work, because it was suspended on 13 December of the same year. It reappeared on the public scene after the Round Table talks in 1989 and started building local structures. It currently has regional structures in 14 provinces, and national congresses are held quite regularly. Today it is the only farmers' trade union that is a member of COPA-COGECA.⁹⁴ Following a wave of protests, the Samoobrona (self-defence) organisation was founded in the early 1990s; despite its political success at the turn of the century, it never formed trade union structures. The third union or, rather, association with syndicate-like functions, is the National Union of Farmers, Farmers' Associations and Organisations (KZRKiOR). These last two organisations have been in deep crisis for several years. All of them, even others that are ephemeral,⁹⁵ are very visible during protests; all of them have done poor or very poor work at grassroots level, often involving nothing more than writing lofty slogans in their programmes and statutes (which can be found online).

With progressive specialisation in agriculture, producers specialising in a given segment also started setting up their organisations. Among the first were beekeepers' unions and associations as well as horse breeders' organisations, which first appeared in the late 19th century. Their aim has been and is to protect the specific interests of a given group of producers. They had already formed quite a well-developed network in People's Poland: according to the *Encyklopedia ekonomiczno-rolnicza* (1984), in 1982 there were 16 national unions, including those for pig, cattle and sheep farmers. On the other hand, there was no organisation of grain or sugar-beet producers. In 1982 the above-mentioned unions appointed the Social Consultation Council of National Unions of Agricultural Segment Associations. In 1991 this was turned into the Federation of Segment Unions of Agricultural Producers. Today this federation comprises 27 leading segment unions.

2.2.4. *The outcome after 100 years*

The development of an agrarian system is a complex process on which the state has a fundamental impact. The process of change in three important elements

⁹⁴ COPA-COGECA, the European organisation of professional agricultural organisations and cooperative organisations, was established in 1962 following a merger of COPA – the Committee of Professional Agricultural Organisations and COGECA – the General Committee for Agricultural Cooperation. Its main purpose is to represent the interests of farmers from the European Union countries.

⁹⁵ Like, for example, the Trade Union of Agricultural Workers, the Wyzwolenie Polish Agricultural Trade Union and, recently, Agro Unia.

of that structure has been presented here: land ownership and the related social forms of production organisation, instruments the state uses to influence agriculture, and the degree of agricultural producers' autonomy as expressed in the possibilities for their self-organisation to support or defend their interests. Each of these elements is political in character, since the state has a major impact on their shape. On the other hand, every state deliberately beginning to develop an agrarian system bases its actions on old elements: structures and institutions that existed and were formed earlier. On this basis, the state strives to achieve a certain vision, either by improving existing elements or radically breaking with them. In Poland the three political periods in the century under consideration featured different combinations of these two types of activity: continuation and retraction.

In the 100 years under analysis, family farming expanded and then maintained its assets, which is why the development of the agrarian system has been described according to the Danish model. In Europe this is a model in which family farming is incorporated into the national economy, a consequence of the political choice to give peasants the task of feeding the nation (Sivignon 1992, p. 138 et seq.). It is a model based on the principle of "positive stimulation" in which the three above-mentioned segments are harmonised. It was not the only model in Europe. Sivignon (1992) mentions two other "pure" models: English and Soviet, the latter being collectivist and based on completely different political choices.⁹⁶ Adaptation of the Danish model was very difficult in the southern and eastern peripheries of Europe; it was similarly difficult and only partially accomplished in Central Europe due to the late granting of freehold to peasants, meagre (and late) industrialisation and the emergence of the rival collectivist model. In a historical perspective, this shows the factors and circumstances involved in abandoning path dependence, examples in the region including Czechia and Slovakia (cf. Maurel, Lacquement 2020).

Poland is an extremely interesting case. Implementation of the Danish model happened late. In the inter-war period "positive stimulation" was made difficult not just by the country's financial condition but also the impossibility of migration from agriculture. Such an option did not emerge until the 1950s, but by then the policy was not one of "positive stimulation" but of "repressive tolerance". This was an era of the cohabitation of two models: Danish and collectivist. The politically defined collectivist vision had to be implemented

⁹⁶ A different classification of these models has also been proposed: Claude Servolin (1989) lists the English, Prussian and Danish models.

in a situation of domination (in terms of area, production and maintenance) of family agriculture based on private ownership of land and (relatively) autonomous production units: family farms. Due to its real-term importance, family agriculture had to be developed despite the lack of a place for it in the collectivist vision. The “repressive tolerance” policy was a hybrid of repression and necessary stimulation. However, it enabled the agrarian structure to stay within path dependence, since in 1990 the main structures in Polish agriculture were still small family farms. And they continue to dominate, as the policy pursued by the Third Republic – shaped under the strong influence of the European Union and largely financed by the EU – led to a paradox: it strengthened several hundred large farms (of different social forms) but at the same time enabled the survival of almost a million small family farms, whose importance in terms of maintenance is negligible but whose political importance is significant.

2.3. Agriculture and its (changing) functions

Agriculture is an important sector of the national economy given that two fundamental indices – its contribution to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and the share of those working in agriculture – are the main indicators of a country’s level of economic development. The boundaries of the different types of economy – pre-industrial, industrial and post-industrial – were defined by employment in the primary sector, mainly comprising the extensive sectors of the economy: agriculture, forestry and fisheries. This decreased six-fold during the century under consideration. Due to the development of the other sectors – the secondary sector, i.e. industry, and then the tertiary sector, i.e. services – this was accompanied by a decrease in the share of the GDP. In 1937 agriculture produced 33% of GDP, in 1960 it was 23%, 16% in 1970, 15% in 1980, 8% in 1990, 3.8% in 2007 and 2.4% in 2016.

The evolution of agriculture’s share in the national economy as described by these two indicators shows that it has shifted from a central place in the economy to one that is all but marginal. This seemingly obvious observation is not completely true, however, because agricultural production is the foundation of feeding the population and therefore agriculture has a special position in every country’s economy, especially when considering its role in ensuring the country’s security. Józef S. Zegar (2019) believes that the share of agriculture in the 100-year history of the Polish economy’s development

can be described, above all, through its contribution to food security, also known as its “white functions”.⁹⁷

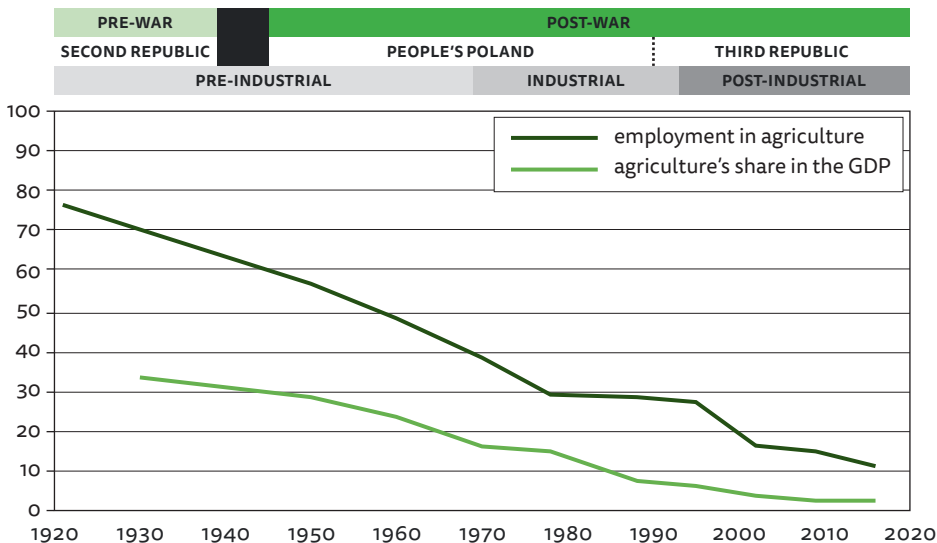


Figure 15. Employment in agriculture and share in GDP 1920–2018

Source: own work based on Szuman 1999, p. 189, Table 1; Kawa 2010, p. 417, Table 1; GUS 2015, and *Zarys historii Polski w liczbach* [Outline of Polish History in Numbers] (GUS 2012).

Food security means the degree to which a society’s nutritional needs are met. At the same time it should be remembered that this changes over history, as nutritional needs and the ways in which they are satisfied change. Food security can be described through agricultural production volume and consumption structure. As Zegar states, in the inter-war period “the value of agricultural production per capita was approx. 15% lower than in the developed countries of Western Europe” (2019, p. 880). Poland imported small amounts of grain (approx. 13,000 tonnes in 1938) and, despite the significant scale of hunger and malnutrition, exported animal – mainly processed – products.

Starting in 1918, agricultural production intensified – in a variable rhythm – due to the enormous impact of progress in agricultural sciences. It was primarily livestock production that increased in the inter-war period.

⁹⁷ Besides these, there are also green, blue and green functions; more in the summary of the “Agriculture” section.

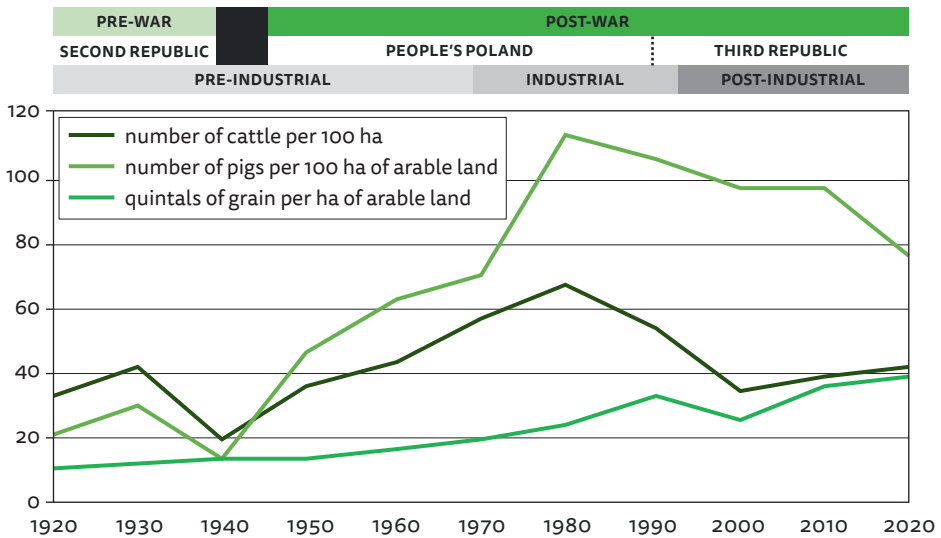


Figure 16.
Development of agricultural production 1921–2016

Source: own work based on: Gorzelak 2010 – data for 1921, 1938, 1946; Zegar 2019 – data for 1950–2016.

World War II resulted in a significant reduction in herds – by more than twice.⁹⁸ Agricultural production did not reach its pre-war level until the early 1950s. Faster development of production began later, in the 1960s, and lasted until the watershed year 1990 and the transformation crisis. But this development was also the result of changes in production tools, methods and techniques. The mechanisation of agriculture progressed during this period as well, which was of great importance in the case of private farming, to which collective mechanisation came through farmers' associations. The possibility of individual purchases of machinery did not appear until the 1970s. This led to increased production in the 1980s: livestock production grew early in the decade and basic crop production (yields of four grains per hectare) – near the end. This was peculiar growth, however: it was extensive, accomplished in the face of a chronic excess of demand over supply of agricultural products, an excess of labour in agriculture and the lack of competition that would exact better product quality and production effectiveness. The effects of the transformation crisis, i.e. temporary withdrawal of subsidies for agriculture, privatisation of the state sector and the economy's opening up to external competition,

⁹⁸ Taking into account the drop in farmland from 25.9 million ha in 1938 to 20.44 million ha in 1946.

became visible in the last decade of the 20th century. After the transformation period, agricultural production increased once again, but in a completely different economic environment, which affected the volume and structure of production. This is especially noticeable in livestock production: the number of cattle dropped while cows' milk yield increased; the production of pork grew, as did the production of poultry meat (over five-fold). Despite malnutrition among the population in the inter-war period⁹⁹ and constant shortages on the domestic market in People's Poland, agricultural production was also a source of convertible currency for the state and was therefore exported. The balance of trade in agri-food goods, starting from the inter-war period and with the exception of "the second half of the 1970s, the martial law years and 1993–2002, was positive, contrary to the overall balance of trade" (Zegar 2019, p. 887).

A comparison between agricultural production indices from the 1920s and the early 21st century shows the scale of the agricultural development that took place in variable conditions of stimulation. As the population grew, increased production was the prerequisite for ensuring the country's food security – this is the main function of agriculture, which the sector fulfilled with varying success during the century in question. In the 1920s and 1930s a large part of the population, mainly in rural areas, was undernourished, and this was also true of the World War II period. Over the next 45 years domestic demand for food exceeded supply despite a visible rise in consumption and its high level in the 1980s.¹⁰⁰ The 21st century brought changes to the consumption structure but also Poland's self-sufficiency in the basic crops and livestock.

Generally speaking, one can say that the saturation limit in food consumption has been achieved. The energy value of consumption (in kcal per capita daily) reaches 3,500, of which two-thirds comes from plant products. In this respect Poland is not significantly different from the EU-15 countries ("old EU"), and the same is true of protein consumption (ibid., p. 889).

Throughout the century in question, agriculture played a very important role in utilising and absorbing labour and in the workforce's livelihood.

⁹⁹ The increase in commercial production in the inter-war period was also the effect of "hunger supply". To obtain money for taxes, loan repayments and other expenses, farmers were forced to sell produce even if their family's needs were not fully met (Jezierski, Leszczyńska 2001, p. 280).

¹⁰⁰ According to Gorzelak (2010, p. 119), "this demand was a consequence of the poor development of production of non-food consumer goods and services and their relatively high prices compared to food".

In 1921 approx. 65% of the national population and approx. 90% of the rural population made a living from agriculture; in 2016 it was approx. 5% and 22%, respectively. Deagrarianisation of rural areas progressed during these 100 years, as described in detail in Chapter 1. This process is illustrated in a synthetic way in Fig. 18, which shows the diminishing share of the farming population (i.e. those making a living mainly from agriculture) nationwide and in rural Poland as well as the decreasing employment in agriculture per 100 hectares of farmland.

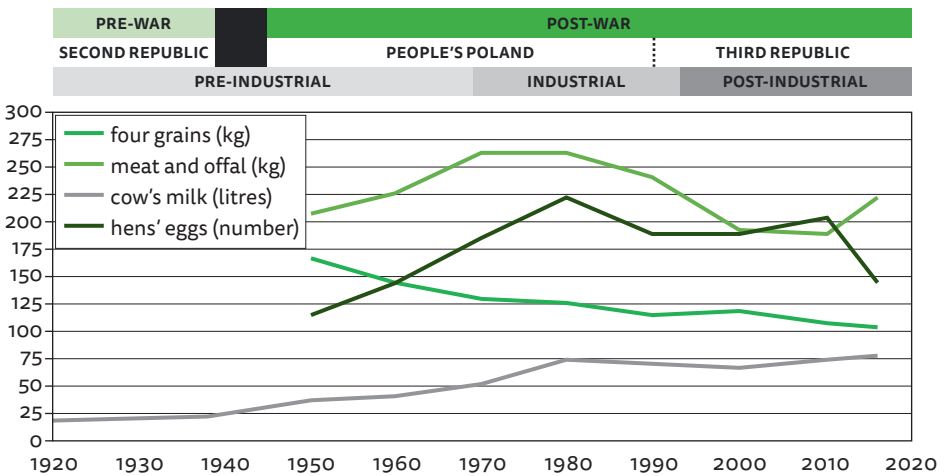


Figure 17.
Consumption of selected agricultural products per capita

Source: own work based on Zegar 2019.

The last indicator shows there was great agrarian overpopulation in 1921–1938, when the number of those employed in farming exceeded 80 per 100 hectares of farmland,¹⁰¹ a drop after the war caused mainly by the population depletion, a decrease at the turn of the 1960s and 1970s caused by Poland's industrialisation, stagnation in the 1980s, and a decrease by more than twice from the beginning of the Third Republic. These changes had different causes: political, economic and social. Throughout the 100-year period, agriculture absorbed an enormous workforce, although that does not mean it was efficiently used: labour productivity in Polish agriculture was and still is low. The truth is, agriculture fulfilled another function for

¹⁰¹ At the time in Denmark it was 36 people, in Germany 49, Czechoslovakia 64. Cited in: Mieszczankowski 1960, p. 32.

the workforce as well: it was a place to tide people over. This was mainly the function of family farming, since the employment indices were much lower in large-scale farming (cf. Fig. 18): in 1938 it was 26 people per 100 hectares of farmland, in 1970 it was 9, in 1980 it was 8.7 and in 2011 it was 3.8. Family farms with their distinctive mechanisms of functioning can absorb the family workforce, providing employment and not considering its effective utilisation. The last time family farms took advantage of this mechanism was in the first years of the post-communist transformation, increasing employment by 10% from 1988 to 1995.

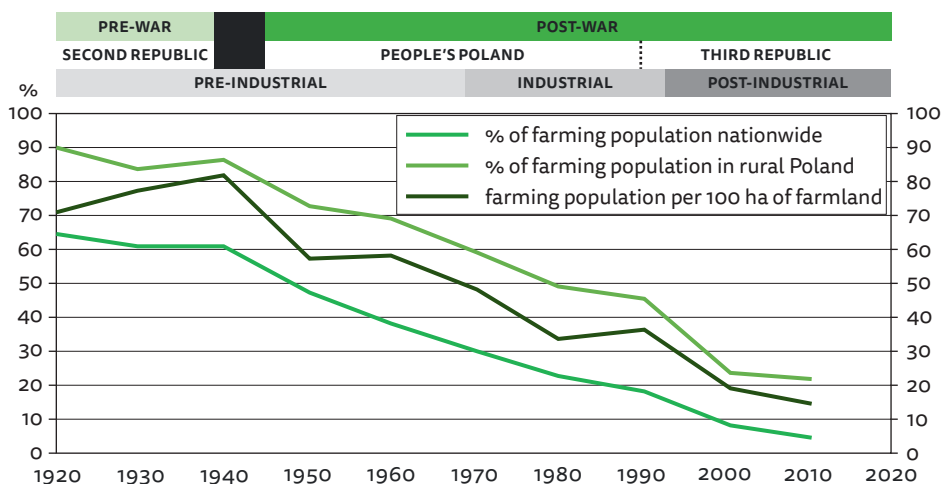


Figure 18. Population making a living mainly from agriculture nationwide and in the countryside, and employment in agriculture per 100 hectares of farmland

Source: own work based on Zegar 2019.

In a post-industrial society, however, the functions of agriculture are defined much more broadly. Agriculture is perceived as a multifunctional sector, since besides producing raw materials and food and other products for industry it supplies other goods and has a positive impact on a farm’s immediate and more distant environment. In other words, it also fulfils social, cultural and nature-related functions that are conducive to maintaining the cohesion and vitality of rural areas. These by no means new functions were only noticed relatively recently and are slowly making their way into the social consciousness. So far, in view of the impossibility of putting a value on them,

they pose something of a problem when estimating agriculture's contribution not only to the rural economy.

3. The rural non-agricultural economy

According to the definition cited earlier, the rural non-agricultural economy is formed by all entities, other than farms, conducting business in rural areas. In the century under consideration the rural economy was never exclusively agricultural, although there were and still are villages where the only business entities are farms. It is an undisputed fact that the share of non-agricultural entities is growing, and one of the reasons for this has been the gradual commodification of the peasant economy and consequently the decline of the autarchic peasant farm satisfying almost all of the family's needs. The few remaining needs were met through neighbourly exchange. Some memoirs from the inter-war period mention shopping outside the farm being reduced to the purchase of salt, matches and kerosene.

As indicated by the social-occupational structure, for example, in the inter-war period rural areas included a modest group of non-agricultural entities. These were mainly small retail outlets and those serving the agriculture of the time (chiefly dealing with agricultural produce purchases) as well as craftsmen. Together they formed the "rural petite bourgeoisie" community. Żarnowski (1973, p. 261) estimates that this was a community of 1,286,000 people, or 36% of the whole class; another 30% lived in towns of up to 20,000 residents and mainly provided services to rural areas. This means that "crafts and rural trade were a major factor in the life of the whole class. ... Rural produce buyers and traders were people strongly hated in some areas" (ibid., p. 262), all the more since in most cases they were Jewish.¹⁰² Cooperative retail outlets also existed but were not as numerous. Agricultural processing facilities (e.g. distilleries, dairies and meat processing businesses) were another element of the rural non-agricultural economy. Jan Majewski (1980) also points to the folk industry, especially weaving. In some regions it was a commercial enterprise; in the Vilnius region, for example, smallholding peasants earned 15 million zlotys on the sale of linen and flax yarn in 1935, while in the same year the Łódź region had 12,000 active cottage industry workshops. Basket weaving, pottery and smithery, lacemaking and embroidery

¹⁰² Hostility towards them was fuelled both by the Roman Catholic clergy and by the National Camp. More on this in Chapter 3.

also developed. The development of such non-agricultural occupations was furthered by chambers of agriculture.¹⁰³

World War II and the Holocaust caused the disappearance of many of these entities in this economy. It began reviving spontaneously in 1944–1948: private and cooperative entities launched and developed operations; this was halted after 1949, when the communist authorities started forming an exclusively nationalised rural non-agricultural economic sector. This was envisioned as a necessary complement to agriculture as the fundamental economic activity in rural areas. Non-agricultural entities were intended to satisfy the basic needs of rural residents and serve agriculture by creating the local framework for its institutional environment. Most of the entities in operation were quasi-cooperative: the old ones that had continued up to 1949 were appropriated by the state (through their incorporation into the command economy system and operations based on predefined indices and directives) while others were formed from scratch according to the rules of the time. Besides these there were also state-owned businesses belonging to what was called local industry. The few available services (according to the contemporary European classification of services) for consumers and the general public were primarily state-run or, less often, quasi-cooperative (e.g. health cooperatives). Paid private services existed in almost every village, provided by various tradesmen (e.g. cobblers, seamstresses, tailors, butchers), but they most often operated in the grey economy (“they didn’t pay up”). Specialists with rarer skills such as spinning, weaving or tanning provided their services over a dozen or a few dozen villages.

Things changed from 1980 to 1988, a period that Wioletta Kamińska (2006) calls the initial phase of the development of individual (i.e. private) non-agricultural business activity.¹⁰⁴ The communist authorities started removing barriers to the development of the private economy, also in rural Poland, in a drive to halt the economic crisis. Private businesses appeared in popular tourist areas (the coast, the mountains) and in areas around conurbations. The fundamental core of the non-agricultural rural economy was still formed by state-owned entities (services for the general public and industrial services) and

¹⁰³ A representation of regional cottage-industry associations was formed in 1939: the Economic Union of Cottage Industry Organisations (Majewski 1980, p. 103).

¹⁰⁴ Four periods in the development of private non-agricultural activity are distinguished in People’s Poland: 1944–1948 – relatively favourable conditions for this development, 1949–1956 – very unfavourable conditions, a drop in the number of entities and the level of employment in this sector, 1956–1980 – consent to very slow development, and the above-mentioned 1980–1988 period. This applied to all economic activity, not just in rural areas (Kamińska 2006).

quasi-cooperative ones. As Marian G. Brodziński (2010) notes, in 1988 the rural cooperative movement had 1,912 SCh commune cooperatives (which operated 71,452 retail outlets), 9,311 units supplying agriculture, 36,067 produce collection points, 4,988 production and service facilities, 323 dairy cooperatives with 721 dairies, 140 horticulture and apiculture cooperatives (which had 1,113 permanent purchase points and 210 processing facilities), 1,663 cooperative banks, 2,006 farmers' association cooperatives (employing over 150,000 people) and 121 handicraft cooperatives. Many of them were located in central villages; peripheral villages were much less well equipped, or even not at all. These entities were supplemented by craftsmen with different specialities, either with legal status or offering "neighbourly" services.¹⁰⁵ In the late 1980s rural Poland was covered by quite a dense network of non-agricultural business entities that were nevertheless largely connected with agriculture. Their formation was also the result of a new concept of multifunctional rural development underlining the importance of local resources and promoting endogenous development.¹⁰⁶

The political transformation demolished the existing economic order in rural areas. Most entities from the nationalised sector disappeared, quasi-cooperative entities first and foremost. They were replaced by private businesses: retail outlets and those providing all kinds of services. The sector of services for the general public, i.e. education, healthcare and local administration, also expanded. At the end of the first decade of the 21st century there were approx. 1,562,000 non-agricultural business entities in rural areas and small towns, four-fifths of which were run by natural persons (Halamska 2013, p. 52 et seq.). They were mainly service providers: 84% operated in the tertiary sector and just 11% in the secondary sector. Of businesses in the tertiary sector, 75% provided services to consumers,¹⁰⁷ 17% to business, 8% provided services for the general public. The non-agricultural rural economy became very diverse: it was founded on small private entities and microenterprises,

¹⁰⁵ These were often specialists (e.g. electricians) working in nationalised workplaces in urban or rural areas.

¹⁰⁶ The emergence of the multifunctional development concept foretold a revolution in thinking about the countryside and rural development, a revolution that would later take place in an evolutionary manner. It was mapped out by political documents: *The Future of the Rural World*, the Cork Declaration of 1996, Agenda 2000, the Salzburg conference in 2004. Rural development appears as an extremely complex process taking place on many levels of social organisation, involving many actors and having many manifestations (Van Der Ploeg et al. 2000). It also features a changing structure of interests and interest groups.

¹⁰⁷ The structure of services for consumers was as follows: 63% tangible services, 23% construction, 14% intangible services (Halamska 2013).

of which over 90% were based on self-employment. They mainly satisfied the needs of local communities and operated chiefly on local markets. And these markets, with locally developed and limited demand and insubstantial competition, had a great impact on the way such businesses functioned; this economy lacked dynamism and innovation.

Two development axes emerged in the spatial structure of non-agricultural individual business activity: one stretching in a curve from the Gdańsk region, through the Bydgoszcz, Poznań and Wrocław regions, to the Kraków region; the other encompassing the Warsaw and Łódź regions. ...Entrepreneurship indices were much higher in the western than the eastern part of the country. The dividing line separates the Warmińsko-Mazurskie, Podlaskie, Lubelskie and Podkarpackie provinces (with low indices) from the rest of the country (Kamińska 2006, p. 201).

This observation also applies to the non-agricultural rural economy. Rosner and Stanny (2014) write about two interpenetrating orders: one geographical, where this economy is more developed in the western part of Poland than in the eastern part, the other intraregional, on the centre-periphery axis (cf. Fig. 12). Its structure was also diverse: in peripheral, agricultural regions, intangible services for the general public played a major role in the non-agricultural rural economy and were most often provided by public entities; in areas where it was most developed – within reach of conurbations and in western Poland – services for business, i.e. for other non-agricultural entities, including those located in towns and cities, became its strong element.

4. The rural economy: mechanisms of change

Rural areas, the countryside, rural residents – these terms are traditionally associated with the original function of territory lying outside cities and towns: agriculture and farming. ... Meanwhile, for at least a few decades rural areas no longer fulfil solely agricultural (sometimes also forestry) production functions; they have become a place where a growing number of residents undertake non-agricultural activity (Heffner 2019, p. 948).

This was reflected in the changing concepts of rural development. In the pre-industrial and industrial period practically the only approach to rural development was to base it on agriculture and its modernisation. This was development that served industrial society in two ways: agriculture was

supposed to free up labour for industry and ensure plentiful and relatively cheap food for the growing non-agricultural, urban population. In the post-industrial stage the perception of rural areas and their development changed to that of a multifunctional space that includes many other, non-agricultural business entities alongside multifunctional agriculture. This universal process of change was specific not only to Poland;¹⁰⁸ it came about during two changes of political system, where the fundamental changes for the transition process took place during the command economy of shortage.

This complex process of change was triggered by several related and overlapping mechanisms. The decisive factor was the macroeconomic situation, which shaped the labour market and ensured a capital flow to agriculture. As it modernised, agriculture also intensified, shedding its excess labour. As the inter-war period showed, the availability of labour was not enough for a non-agricultural economy to appear in rural areas: the excess workforce was still “hidden unemployment in agriculture”. The other mechanism was the progressive division of labour and work specialisation. This is illustrated by the transition from the autarchic peasant farm anchored in the local community, its only purchases being “salt, matches and kerosene”, to the family agricultural enterprise in which farmers even buy their parsley. The progressive division of labour meant that businesses meeting specific and increasingly diverse needs emerged. New needs shaped demand for certain goods and services; these appeared in a certain order that depended on the level of a society’s development. The demand for them (and the extent to which they were satisfied) depended on their importance for people’s lives and wellbeing. The hierarchy of needs – from basic to higher and secondary – is common knowledge.

Recalling this classic mechanism should serve as the basis for distinguishing the unique nature of the process of change in Poland’s rural economy, which differed from Czechoslovakia and Hungary both in its inter-war situation¹⁰⁹ and in the solutions applied under communism. Throughout the century in question in Poland, the template for change was the inter-war agrarian overpopulation

¹⁰⁸ This is suggested by the similar employment structure in 1993. In Poland the primary sector employed 26.2% of the economically active population, the secondary sector 31.3%, the tertiary sector 42.5%; in Czechia: primary 7%, secondary 42.8%, tertiary 50.2%; Slovakia: primary 12.1%, secondary 35.7%, tertiary 52.2%; Hungary: primary 9.9%, secondary 34.9%, tertiary 55.2% (Draft 1996). Bohemia in Czechoslovakia was already more industrialised in the inter-war period, hence the transition to the industrial stage occurred sooner.

¹⁰⁹ Namely the high level of industrialisation and an efficiently conducted agricultural reform in Czechia as well as the semi-feudal relations in Hungarian agriculture and the weak impact of agricultural reform.

inherited from the Russian and Austro-Hungarian empires, largely stemming from the peripheral location of these areas in relation to the imperial centres. Social relations were extremely complex in these poorly developed agricultural regions: clientelism- and patronage-based ownership relations steeped in antagonism overlapped with national antagonisms. World War II brought enormous losses in assets, including in human resources. The disappearance of the rural Jewish petite bourgeoisie, which left a social, economic and cultural void, weakened rural non-agricultural entrepreneurship. During People's Poland two factors had a deciding modifying influence: extensive industrialisation with underdeveloped urbanisation, and the rules by which the shortage economy functioned. The former factor created peasant-workers, determining a slow rhythm of changes on family farms and an enormous share of small-holding farms in the agrarian structure to this day. On the other hand, the fact that the owners of family farms worked outside the countryside and agriculture not only brought an improvement of their families' standard of living, but often also additional means for modernising the farm. An improved financial situation but also the greater, simultaneous burden of working on the farm and in a non-agricultural business led to the emergence of new needs, thus creating demand for goods and services. The mechanisms of the communist shortage economy modified these changes. The lack of sufficient supply of industrial consumer goods resulted in greater demand for food, which the agri-food economy was unable to satisfy (cf. Zegar 2019). Hence the persistence of a high level of self-supply of foodstuffs in rural households¹¹⁰ and the large share of the grey economy in satisfying other needs. Rural areas, living a little on the sidelines of the main political and social events, were "invaded" by "liberalism after communism"¹¹¹ in 1989. This is a period that farmers remember with bitterness, as they were helpless in the face of the wild capitalism that took control of agricultural markets for a time. Many peasant-labourers lost their jobs in industrial plants undergoing restructuring, a new wave of baby boomers

¹¹⁰ This was visible especially after rationing was introduced in 1976 and later expanded to include many other products. The last ration cards (for meat) were abolished as late as 1989. Owners of more than 1 hectare of land were not entitled to a meat ration. On many smallholdings, feeding small livestock was based on bread, the price of which was set by the government.

¹¹¹ I refer to the title of Jerzy Szacki's book *Liberalizm po komunizmie* [Liberalism after Communism], published by Znak in 1994. The author sets out to prove that liberalism was "brought" to Polish society by post-communist reformers. Liberal ideology was practically non-existent in Polish economic thought in the inter-war period. The dominant trends back then were agrarianism, socialism and nationalism, all strongly anti-liberal. Liberalism was also attacked by the strong Roman Catholic Church, and actually still is today. In fact, this open criticism is more widespread than criticism of communism during People's Poland (cf. Halamska 1997).

was entering the labour market – some of these were absorbed by family farming. Many others sought a livelihood in enterprises that sprang up ad hoc.¹¹² To this violent process were added European regulations, implemented from 1998 in the pre-accession period and binding from 2004. Many people in Poland – not only rural residents – were not ready for this sudden cultural change that sought to fill a half-century gap in the evolutionary development of economic institutions (Sztompka 2000).¹¹³

For some years now representatives of the social sciences – chiefly economists and sociologists – have been asking questions about the types or varieties of capitalism that will develop on such a unique historical foundation. Observations of countries in Central-Eastern Europe do not provide an unequivocal answer. One extensive study¹¹⁴ outlines standard approaches that show either varieties of capitalism or the diversity of capitalism. Research with such an orientation suggests there is no single model of the development of post-communist capitalism, although some studies distinguish the clusters of the Visegrád countries and the Baltic republics as well as Slovenia.¹¹⁵ Even among the Visegrád countries some economies are “more liberal” and others “more coordinated”; however, these principles determine things important for the rural economy, such as control of the land market or the degree of economic freedom which fosters or halts the development of the rural non-agricultural economy. Some researchers have suggested that these countries (particularly from the Visegrád Group) should be placed

¹¹² Even in 2010 research by the Polish Agency for Enterprise Development (PARP) showed that they had few capital resources, were founded without any preliminary market analyses, functioned intuitively, had no strategy and saw no need for one (cf. Halamska 2013, p. 55 et seq.).

¹¹³ Sztompka describes it as a “cultural trauma”. The process of acculturation proceeds with many “cultural deformations”. This means simplification, impoverishment and even degradation of Western culture during its adaptation by peripheral countries. A dual mechanism is involved. Firstly, the clash with the peripheral culture leads to selection eliminating higher values and more sophisticated content. The peripheries adopt what is easiest, simplest and most superficial, as such content is best absorbed by the unprepared, mass audience. Secondly, we have a compromise reconciling content coming from outside with local customs and traditions: in an autocratic society the import of democratic institutions leads to superficial democracy, freedom of speech results in general arguments and the expression of the most improbable views, while rock or soul music transforms into disco polo.

¹¹⁴ Rapacki R., Gardawski J., Czerniak A., Horbaczewska B., Karbowski A., Maszczyk P., Próchniak M. (2018) *Wyłaniające się odmiany kapitalizmu w Europie Środkowo-Wschodniej: przegląd badań* [Emerging Varieties of Capitalism in Central-Eastern Europe: Research Overview]. *Ekonomista* No. 5, p. 524.

¹¹⁵ This seems to be confirmed by subsequent analyses (Pietraś 2019) showing that the pace of change is different in the new European Union member states and other post-communist countries in Eastern Europe. This also applies to the better condition of these societies as measured by the HDI. The question is, to what extent is this due to integration with the EU and to what degree is it the result of the existing foundation and the reforms undertaken that enabled these countries to join the European club?

in a new category: the dependent market economy. As far as the rural economy is concerned, the element of agriculture's dependence on the Common Agricultural Policy is extremely visible in Poland. Among the many ideas out there, there are some that according to the authors of the above-mentioned study are very interesting – new, non-standard concepts of post-communist capitalism. One example is the concept proposed by Dorothee Bohle and Bela Greskovits, invoking Karl Polanyi's analysis model of taking into account factors related to politics, social protection and the market. The Visegrád countries are included in the embedded neoliberal type. "This type is constituted, above all, by continual attempts to achieve an acceptable compromise between market transformations and social cohesion, especially in the area of democratic governance in which the demand that citizens be maximally involved is hard to reconcile with the goal of efficient and effective democratic mechanisms" (Rapacki et al. 2018, p. 539). The authors of this study (written five years after *Capitalist Diversity on Europe's Periphery*) express doubts, however, that – in the light of Hungarian policies after 2010 and in Poland after 2015 – "neoliberalism was in fact embedded in these countries or to what extent" (ibid.). In other words, the view that the transformation in the post-communist countries has been completed was and still is premature.

3. RURAL COMMUNITIES

Between 1918 and 2018, “rural areas changed from an integrated sociocultural system into a diverse community in terms of occupation, lifestyle and cultural and social aspirations” (Styk 1993).
How did this come about?

The rural population, which stood at about 20 million in 1918 and about 15 million a hundred years later, has never been distributed evenly across the country, but forms clusters called villages. A century ago, villagers lived in over 40,000 administrative units called *sołectwo* (usually a single village), today there are over 43,000 villages in Poland. These are very varied. The most populous (Kozy in Śląskie province) has over 12,000 residents while the smallest (Dąbrowa in Lubelskie province) has just a few. The longest village (Zawoja in Małopolskie province) stretches for 18 km and occupies 100 sq. km; it is divided into 15 parts comprising over 170 hamlets and two settlements.

Villages have always been very diverse, but noticeably different from cities and towns. On the basis of research from the early 20th century, Robert Redfield (1941) listed the differences between the “village world” and the “city world”.¹¹⁶ A similar picture was presented in numerous monographs of Polish, Slovak or Romanian villages from the early 20th century (Durand-Drouhina, Szwengrub, Mihailescu 1984), highlighting the material and mental ties within them. Analysing extensive literature on the subject, Paweł Starosta states that:

a local community is therefore a type of social and spatial structure whose constitutive features are: 1) a geographical territory defining a single cluster of people; 2) the population living there; 3) the systems of connections, relationships and institutions making the whole internally integrated, i.e. capable of undertaking joint actions to solve its problems; 4) a degree of mental amalgamation of all or some of the residents with the social and spatial structure as a major cultural value (Starosta 1995, p. 30).

¹¹⁶ He saw them in: 1) the types of occupations present, 2) the nature of the environment, 3) the community size, 4) the density of the population, 5) its homogeneity or heterogeneity, 6) the system of social stratification, 7) the character of social and geographic mobility, and 8) the type of social relations. In general, the village was treated as a local community: a socially and culturally homogeneous, economically autarchic and relatively isolated conglomerate of families / household groups (Redfield 1956).

Hence, three aspects of the community are important here: the geographic (territory), the social (relations between inhabitants) and the mental (sense of belonging).

1. "Rural territories": village, parish, territory of government

1.1. The village

An analysis of the territorial aspect is only ostensibly simple, though every locality is geographically situated somewhere. To its inhabitants of a hundred years ago, the village was a "place";¹¹⁷ a space, a territory: familiar, ordered, arranged, endowed with emotions, and at the same time physically isolated due to poor roads, limited access to the railway or the nearest town. Majewski (1980, pp. 93–94) writes that:

in Poland (1937) there was just 5.2 km of railway per 100 sq. km ... The ratio of hard-surface roads was also unfavourable: the average in Poland (1938) was 16.2 km per 100 sq. km ... Let us also cite extreme cases: some farms in Łańcut *powiat*/county lay 44 km from the county capital, 13 km from the nearest town and 17 km from a railway station, and this was in a situation of a complete lack of paved roads.

The space of these village-places was organised in many different ways, and the types of development have undergone constant change over the past century (more in Chapter 4). Local demographic trends played an overwhelming role in this. In villages whose population grew, the territory they occupied increased, often to an extent obscuring their original shape due to the absence of planning constraints (Bański 2019; Kowicki 2011). For example, the population of the village of Brzeźnica near Skawina in the Małopolska region has increased from about 1,000 in the early 1980s to over 1,300, and this increase resulted in streets being named there in 2013. Marek Kłodziński (2019) writes about the village of Przybyszew, Białobrzegi *powiat* in the Mazovia region, which lost almost half its population between 1927 and 2017, today having about

¹¹⁷ The sociology of space distinguishes different types of place. The classic distinction is between "space" and "place". As Yi-Fu Tuan writes, "Space is a common symbol of freedom in the Western world. Space lies open; it suggests the future and invites action. ... Enclosed and humanised space is place. Compared to space, place is a calm centre of established values. ... Place is security, space is freedom: we are attached to the one and long for the other" (Yi-Fu Tuan 1987, p. 13 et seq., cited in Jałowiecki, Szczepański 2002, p. 317).

640 inhabitants. New villages (or parts of them) were also formed after the parcellation of land in the inter-war period; some years after the 1944 agricultural reform, new buildings appeared in the “lordly” fields. However, there are also areas where villages disappeared or are disappearing as a result of political decisions,¹¹⁸ like the village of Dąbrowa mentioned above.

All of these cases illustrate that the name and geographical location might be the same, but the place is not. I vividly remember a sunny October day several years ago when my brother and I drove our aunt, who was in her eighties, around the village where she had lived her whole life. She had not been able to get around much for a few years. She looked around her with great interest and commented on changes, most often repeating: “I don’t recognise anything”.

Analysing the importance of territory and its changes for the constitution of village communities, one cannot ignore the impact of the great migrations that took place in Polish territory after World War II. The German population was expelled from the “Regained Territories” (Western and Northern Territories), and a stream of people from the “Lost Territories”, particularly the former eastern provinces, was sent there. The processes of “appropriating” the new territory, all the way to accepting it as one’s own, were dramatic, complex and long-lasting.¹¹⁹ The reasons for this included its “foreign” past, civilisation distance, cultural otherness¹²⁰ and enduring doubt as to the permanence of the settlement situation. All these processes affected the relations between rural residents and their territories.

Is the village still a “place” to contemporary residents, one with which they are connected through emotions, or is it just where they live? Most rural residents come from the countryside: they were born and grew up in the village where they live or in its vicinity. But the attitude towards their place

¹¹⁸ I am referring here to areas whose residents were displaced as a result of Operation Vistula (the forced resettlement of Ukrainian minority inhabitants from areas in south-eastern Poland – translator’s annotation), and villages in the former Kieleckie province that were dispersed in 1951-1952 to make way for a military training ground (which was never set up).

¹¹⁹ A good illustration of this can be found in a two-volume novel (*Ptasi gościniec* and *Babie lato*) by Halina Auderska, written in the early 1970s and describing the journey of a fisherman from Polesye, Szymon Drozd, to the Regained Territories.

¹²⁰ This struggle with the German past often continues to this day. In her reportage *Pogłaskać trójno-giego psa* (2019) Joanna Cieśla writes about a few villages in Lower Silesia where people from the east were resettled. They have only now “found the courage to discover the German past of their [villages of] Grabiszycze, Chromiec, Kopaniec. That there were Germans here before them is a fact – they say. It is neither good nor bad”. Throughout the People’s Poland period, this German past was denied and ancient Polish Piast-era traces were sought instead.

of residence, identifying with it as an "important psychocultural aspect ensuring normative and cultural integration" (Starosta 1995, p. 124), is not equally strong for all. This is shown by research from the last decades of the 20th and the first decades of the 21st century.

Table 6.
Types of local identification (%)

Statements (Thurstone scale)	Villages*			
	1988			2008
	Widawa	Głuchów	Ręczno	"Kraina Rawki"
1. Everyone here has everything that is best.	1.3	6.1	1.0	13.5
2. I feel at home here, and rather alien in a big city.	44.2	41.4	44.4	32.0
3. You can always get by here, there's a garden, it makes life easier.	15.5	25.3	15.5	18.5
4. There is no entertainment here, but you can always go to a big city for that.	3.3	3.0	2.1	9.5
5. Things are more and more difficult everywhere, it makes no difference where you live.	14.8	15.6	16.4	12.0
6. There's only work here for some population groups.	3.3	4.6	15.5	7.5
7. Life here is less interesting.	5.5	0.0	3.1	3.5
8. A big city offers prospects of some kind, while here people's lives are a waste.	8.8	2.0	1.0	2.5
9. I'm fed up with this hole.	3.3	2.0	1.0	1.0

* All of these villages lie in today's Łódzkie province; "Kraina Rawki" (River Rawka Land) is the name of a Local Action Group covering five communes in this province.

Source: own work based on Starosta 1995, p. 125, and Śpiewak 2011, p. 135.

The great majority of residents identify with the locality where they live (statements 1–4). However, some do not show such identification (statement 5) while between a few and a dozen per cent or so feel deprived because they live in a given locality. Overall there are over 20% of them in each case, which indicates that "the process of mental distancing from the environment of residence is not a marginal trend in Poland" (Starosta 1995, p. 126).

One major regulator of the sense of local connectedness has long been the migration of urban dwellers to the countryside: in all, more than nine million people moved from cities/towns to rural areas between 1950 and 2018.

This trend intensified in the 21st century. Those moving from urban to rural areas are “villagers by choice”. Their motivation for moving has always been varied: economic, family-related, due to pursuing current trends or choosing a certain lifestyle. Moving to a rural area in itself does not mean automatic identification with the countryside. As analyses of the rural gentrification process have shown, urban migrants, who most often have ties to the city (through their origins, job, social network), settle mainly in localities around cities. Nor do they automatically identify with their locality of residence, since they very often settle in new housing developments where they pursue a rural lifestyle of their own invention, different from the lifestyle of the native residents (Zwęglińska-Gatecka 2019).¹²¹

Further problems in analysing the territorial aspects of local communities are caused by the unspecified size of a territory. Territory is not only the area occupied by the group of people living there, but is sometimes defined by the reach of an institution, e.g. a religious one (the territory of a parish) or a local-government one (today the territory of a *gmina*/commune).

1.2. The parish

In the Middle Ages, parishes were associated with rural churches and communities of the faithful. “The location of these buildings was based on two factors: one social – a sufficiently large local population, the other geographic – a prominent or easily accessible site. In Poland today, the territoriality of parishes is underlined in both secular and ecclesiastical legal instruments” (Klima 2011, p. 234). According to secular law, a parish is an organisational unit of the Church; according to canon law, a parish is a community of the faithful. However, territory and space are important enough for the Roman Catholic Church’s Primate Council for Church Construction to specify the distances (spatial and temporal) for church location within a parish. The territorial aspect applies to the two main functions of a parish: administration and evangelisation. The latter refers to the special nature of bonds in a parish. “The parish creates a sense of bonding with the Church, but through bonding with the group. Janusz Mariański (1984) believes that thanks to the parish, Roman Catholics maintain their bond with the Church as an institution” (Klima 2011, p. 235). Territorial parishes, with parish churches as their local centres of gravity, “formally comprise Catholics (those who have been baptised and have

¹²¹ Sometimes, as Dominika Zwęglińska-Gatecka writes, they try to create their own territorial identity and to impose it on the autochthonous residents.

not stepped out of the Church) living in a specific territory. In other words, all Catholics living in the area formally belong to the parish" (Sadłoń 2019, p. 353).

The territories of these extremely old social and spatial structures underwent multiple changes over the past century. Their number grew slightly in the inter-war period: there were 4,500 parishes at the start of the second decade of the 20th century, 4,999 in 1934 and 5,170 in 1937. The changed borders after the war affected the Catholic Church's administrative structures. There were 6,692 parishes in Poland in 1973 (73% of them in rural areas), 7,715 in 1982 and 8,459 in 1987. This means that during the half-century of People's Poland, an era abundant in various administrative restrictions, the number of parishes increased by more than 60%. Further growth, by 21% to 10,248, occurred in the Third Republic. Rural parishes, which number 6,653, make up 64% of the total¹²² while comprising 35% of Poland's Catholics. The average rural parish has a population of about 1,800, including Catholics and non-Catholics, which makes rural parishes much smaller than urban ones. "This testifies to the far-reaching development of the parish network in Poland, especially in the countryside. ... with single exceptions, nowhere else in the world is the network of Catholic parishes as well-developed as in Poland", remarks Wojciech Sadłoń (ibid., p. 359). There is no question that the Catholic Church has colonised rural Poland. It is also worth noting that the bond between the faithful and the parish is a complex one, as it involves two components which are hard to separate: one religious, the other social.

1.3. *Gmina*/commune: local-government territory

All the residents of a territory assigned to a local authority are subject to that authority, regardless of its form. "The organisational model of local authorities was different [in different times], but the tasks performed were always those of the state. Local authorities were never absolutely independent and always fulfilled a specific political role" (Piasecki, Ptak 2019, p. 673). The territory covered by local authorities also changed many times as a result of changes in their form and position in the political system. The first model of local authority in the century under analysis was local government. Until 1933 it functioned in various forms inherited from the partitioning powers, namely collective *gmina*/communes in the former Kingdom of Poland and single-village communes in territories formerly in the Prussian and Austrian partitions. The

¹²² Urban-rural parishes account for 15%. There are also 129 Eastern Rite parishes, some of them lying in rural areas.

local-authority system was unified and organised in 1933: 3,195 collective communes were established, comprising “hamlets, townships, peasant villages, settlements, estates, neighbourhoods, farm communities, impoverished gentry villages and manor farms” (Piasecki, Ptak 2018, p. 36). The communes were made up of *sołectwo* units, which usually comprised one village. The 1944–1989 period was a time of constant searches for “the best territory for governing” (Maurel 1984). First of all, the local-authority model changed to one made up of people’s councils modelled on the Soviet system and constituting local bodies of state authority. “People’s councils were assigned the role of temporary legislative and local-government bodies, operating on the national (National People’s Council, KRN), province, county, municipal and commune level” (Piasecki, Ptak 2019, p. 52). The old, pre-war territorial division was left in place for almost 10 years, but communes, which numbered about 3,000, differed significantly between one another. In the old territories they were collective communes, and usually single-village ones in the newly added territories. A new administrative division of Poland was effected in 1954, and *gromada* became the smallest unit. As many as 8,790 of these were established. One of the obvious purposes of the reform was to break up existing communities, demolish existing social hierarchies, strip them of elites and authorities, and make it easier to control peasant communities that were putting up passive resistance (“bringing the authorities closer to the people”). The number of *gromada* units was reduced gradually, with 4,315 surviving until the next administrative reform in 1973. This means that about 9,000 villages were given the status of “central villages” in 1954 and then half of them were stripped of that status in a gradual process. Such status meant that the village in question was the location of not only local authorities but also other, e.g. economic and welfare institutions. Again under the slogan of “bringing the authorities closer to the citizens” (by increasing the jurisdiction of local authorities) and creating economic microregions, 2,365 *gmina* units (communes) were created in 1973. Each of these should have been equipped with an identical set of commune institutions. Besides administrative authorities, i.e. the commune people’s council (GRN) and the commune prefect as its executive body, these institutions comprised the commune committee (KG PZPR) of the Polish United Workers’ Party (PZPR, the ruling communist party) with its commune secretary, who most often also chaired the GRN, a police (MO) station (the police force was called the Citizens’ Militia, MO), the farmers’ association cooperative (SKR), the commune SCh cooperative, a cooperative bank, the commune “collective school” (reducing the status

of schools in the other villages) and the commune health centre. The territorial coverage of these institutions was adjusted to the administrative-political "territory of the authorities". The jobs of the directors of all the above bodies were part of the commune *nomenklatura*; the KG PZPR decided appointments. The communes themselves were incorporated into the economic planning system; their independence was illusory, because planning guidelines were handed down from the higher, provincial level, and provinces had to "balance out" with the national-level plans.

In the 1970s I became the owner of about 8,000 sq. m of land that commune statistics classified as a farm. It was therefore subject to the agricultural census that usually took place in June. There was an instance in the 1980s when I answered the commune clerk's questions in person as she filled in the census forms. I told her (consulting with my mother) what crops had been sown etc. The clerk asked if I had any livestock. I said no. She pondered over the form, then said: "That cannot be" and added a pig and a few hens to my list, thus creating data for the future agricultural production plan for the commune. But when such a commune plan reached the province level, it had to be corrected in such a way that everything would add up in the national economic development plan for a given year.

This reform was contested by some rural residents because it deprived many localities of elements of their identity, e.g. a school built by the residents themselves, "their own GS" (i.e. SCh cooperative) or being within a particular commune. The 1990 reform changed the character of local authorities but did not affect their territories: the commune boundaries were not changed. So many changes of the "territory for authorities" in the course of 100 years were not conducive to the development of residents' sense of having ties to the territory. The question of (re)integrating communes was the subject of many analyses in the 1970s. It was suggested that there was a big role in this for joint institutions and organisations satisfying the needs of *gmina* communities (Piotrowski 1975; Turowski 1992). Many of those institutions gradually disappeared after 1989 (e.g. commune communist party committees, SCh cooperatives, farmers' association cooperatives), which overturned formal and informal local hierarchies.¹²³ New ones appeared in their place, including the institution of *wójt* (commune leader), chosen in direct elections since 2002.

All three of these social-spatial structures: village, parish and *gmina*/commune, make up the local territories of a rural resident. The parish and

¹²³ In memoirs from the 1990s watershed, one person pointed out that now they didn't know where to go, who to complain to.

the commune have much greater spatial reach and a population many times greater than a village. The units they are composed of are villages; statistically, one parish covers about six villages and one commune covers almost three parishes and about 16 villages. Each of these local spatial structures has its boundaries. However, within those broader local communities, or maybe only groups, there are “better” and “worse” villages, often in connection with their central or peripheral location, though there are other reasons as well.

Well-known and widely researched examples include the relations between minor-gentry and peasant villages in the Mazovia and Podlasie regions, where a sense of “lordliness” and “peasantness” was the foundation of opinions on “superiority” and “inferiority”. It was the same with peasant and post-PGR (state farm) villages. However, this also applies to regions having only peasant villages. In my native Brzeźnica mentioned above, the village of Jaśkowice in the neighbouring commune had the status of a “worse” village, allegedly because of the inhabitants’ different ethnic background. This was manifested, for example, in the opinion about “Jaśkowice taste”, a synonym of bad taste. It was also perceptible (in the 1960s) in teachers’ attitude towards children from the “worse” villages that did not have a full elementary school, which the children had to complete in the “better” village. Segregation was frequent: there were classes comprising only children from the “better village” and mixed classes of children from the “worse” villages. This kind of segregation also took place during the formation of middle school classes in the first decades of the 21st century.

They are important to the villagers to the extent that they influence their social identities. Interference of elements of the village, parish and commune identities almost certainly takes place. However, I doubt that any present-day rural resident would describe herself as “a Kossowa girl from Tłuczań parish in Brzeźnica commune”,¹²⁴ following the example of the 16th-century canon who signed himself as “*natione Polonus, gente Ruthenus, origine Judeus*” (Tazbir 1998, p. 101). The territorialism of rural communities raises another question: to what extent does the mental bond with a given territory determine attitudes towards other people, how far does it decide in defining “our” group and the group of “the other”? How does it affect judgements of these groups? Is satisfaction with the moral norms in force in one’s own environment, for example, the effect of their relativisation, or do deformations stemming from

¹²⁴ It is how I could describe myself: I was born in Kossowa, baptised in the Parish of the Visitation in Tłuczań, and lived in Brzeźnica commune until the age of 14. All these localities lie in Wadowice powiat/county, once made famous by the writer Emil Zegadłowicz and the painter Wojciech Weiss, and nowadays by John Paul II.

the psychological rules of perceiving one's own group come into play? Even though the functions of territory are changing in the era of globalisation, territorialism is still present in rural communities. Guaranteeing individuals a sense of belonging is becoming its important function, related to a sense of security as well as a sense of familiarity and uniqueness, the latter being an antagonist of the homogeneity brought about by globalisation.

2. Residents: "our own" and "the other"

"The first feature of a village as a local community is the size of its population. This figure has never been a fixed value ... European villages at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries ranged from a few hundred to a few thousand people" (Rybicki 1972, p. 20). Changes in the size of villages were discussed above, but although important, size is not *the* most important feature. The inhabitants of traditional rural communities, to which Polish villages belonged in the early 20th century, should fulfil the condition of homogeneity. Paweł Rybicki distinguishes two types: "In a rural community, homogeneity in the stricter sense is connected with the practice of village endogamy ... The countryside is homogeneous in the broader sense of the word through the fact that rural families are involved in just one type of economy and pursue similar lifestyles linked to that economy" (ibid., p. 22). A hundred years ago the homogeneity of rural communities was the effect of their peasantness. Almost all rural residents made a living from agriculture, and though not all of them were farmers (in today's sense of the word), the rhythm and style of daily life was defined by the dominant group: peasant farmers. This homogeneity underwent a gradual erosion with the progressive division of labour in industrial society. A growing number of people appeared whose livelihood did not come from agriculture; they worked outside the village, performing the same jobs regardless of the weather and season. Villages included residents living in different social rhythms. These changes accelerated in the second half of the 20th century and in its final decade. Today only a fifth to a quarter of rural residents declare themselves as farmers. However, it is very important to note that changes in the social-occupational structure of local communities occurred in very varied rhythms, and their effects are not at all identical. A village's location in relation to a city or industrial centre, in a region more developed economically and with good transport connections, had the greatest impact on these changes, which took place most rapidly in precisely such localities. In communities that were peripheral, including on a local scale, these

changes started later, were slower and progressed differently. Today there are no homogeneous villages with a uniform social-occupational structure. Every village includes farmers, labourers with working-class occupations and people working in jobs once called intelligentsia occupations, who today belong to the middle class in a broad sense.

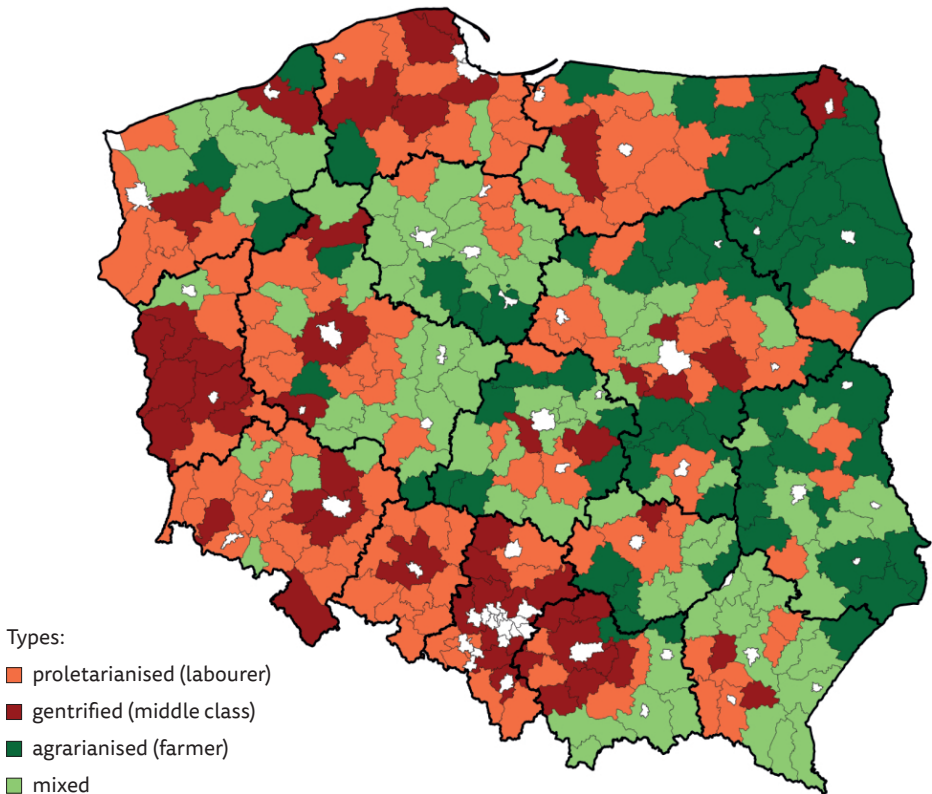


Figure 19. Spatial distribution of social-occupational structure types (by *powiat*)

Source: Halamska 2018, p. 51 based on Halamska, Hoffmann, Stanny 2017, p. 101.

As noted above, farmers in Poland account for only about a quarter of rural residents, almost the same proportion as the middle class.¹²⁵ Labourers (the working class) are the dominant group.¹²⁶ The proportions are different in different *powiats*/counties, *gminas*/communes and villages, meaning that

¹²⁵ This includes managers, chief executives, senior officials, specialists, technicians and associate professionals, officials and clerical support workers.

¹²⁶ This group also includes service and sales workers.

these groups form different social environments. Farmers still dominate in agrarianised communities, but on average only a sixth of the residents belong to the middle class (cf. Table 7). In proletarianised communities, two-thirds are labourers and a sixth are farmers. Few farmers, i.e. just a twelfth, live in gentrified communities, which have been deeply remodelled by the process of *embourgeoisement*. We can assume with high probability that there is a significant group of villages with no farmers at all. However, there are also villages without a single representative of the middle class.

Table 7.

Types of social structure in *powiats* by the share of the structure's segments: middle class, farmers and labourers

Rural structure type	Type	Segment percentage share			Percentage of <i>powiats</i>
		Middle class	Farmers	Labourers	
mixed	1	19.0	34.0	47.0	27.4
gentrified	2	40.6	8.6	50.8	16.6
proletarianised	3	16.9	16.8	66.3	35.0
agrarianised	4	15.1	59.2	25.7	21.0

Source: own work based on Halamska, Hoffmann, Stanny 2017.

These varied social-occupational compositions of rural communities suggest, first of all, changes in the structures of social contacts and relations at the foundation of social ties and, secondly, the existence of many different ranges of interclass relations in those different environments.

Social-occupational heterogenisation caused a diversification of the strength and nature of social ties. These changes were only seemingly linear, and progressed from strong ties in homogeneous communities to weaker and varied ones in heterogeneous communities, since "the inner unification of the [traditional – M.H.] village, even the most homogenous, has its limits" (Rybicki 1972, p. 23). Moreover, the homogeneity of rural areas does not mean their egalitarianism. A hundred years ago, peasant farms in every village differed in size and management style. They were the basis of the village hierarchy: *wielkokmiecie* and *kmiecie* (very wealthy and wealthy peasants) were at the top, followed by peasants with medium-size farms, smallholders, and the semi-proletariat with its group of hired manual labourers. Everyone knew their place in the hierarchy, and everyone else's place as well: these communities were governed by the principle of *interconnaissance*, i.e. interconnection,

where everyone knew everything about everybody else (Czarnowski 1956; Mendras 1976). Such a community of farming families had a very complex web of relations: family, neighbourly and economic. Economic differences, which were mainly defined by the amount of land owned, were the foundation for the development of patron-client networks, based not only on the regular economic exchange of labour and goods but containing other elements as well: care, socialising, loyalty and emotions. The scientific literature features two types of narrative on the traditional village. One highlights the corporate solidarity of “those who farm”, peasant collaboration and democracy, the other underlines existing differences (in wealth above all) and antagonisms, as well as tracking down relations of domination and dependence (cf. Wieruszewska 2019, pp. 262–266). One fits into the tradition of agrarianism, the other into the leftist tradition. What is most important here, however, is that manifestations of all the above trends could be found in every rural community. In a situation of agrarian overpopulation and unemployment, hired farm labourers and owners of tiny farms had to seek extra sources of income, which could only be provided by wealthier farmers who were short-handed. Such patron-client networks still existed throughout the People’s Poland period (Adamski 1974; Maurel 1989), though domination-dependence relations had grown much weaker.¹²⁷ This type of bond based on working the land and on cooperation between farming families (e.g. shared draught animals,¹²⁸ neighbourly assistance) gradually disappeared as the proportion of farmers diminished, agricultural services appeared, farming became mechanised and job opportunities outside agriculture emerged.

A hundred years ago the inhomogeneity of rural communities was caused by more than just economic factors. The Second Republic was a multi-ethnic state. As a reminder: according to estimates offered by Żarnowski (1973, p. 184 et seq.), of the 16.4 million peasant population in 1931 only 9.7 million (under 60%) were Polish. The rest were Ukrainian (4.0 million), Belarusian (1.2 million), “local people” in Polesye (0.7 million), German (0.4 million) and other (0.4 million). Some rural communities, especially in the borderland, were ethnically mixed. However, “over two million (maybe about 2.2 million) Polish peasants lived in the eastern territories of the inter-war Polish state, outside the cohesive Polish ethnographic area” (ibid.). To this we need to add a small number of Jewish small-time farmers and a much larger group of rural

¹²⁷ Władysław Adamski (1974) describes patrons’ “efforts” to secure client loyalty; in the 1980s Marie Claude Maurel (1989) investigated the rules of patron-client exchange and its customary setting.

¹²⁸ Kazimierz Dobrowolski (1966, 2005) describes such practices.

Jewish "practitioners", i.e. craftsmen, shopkeepers, small wholesalers trading in produce, moneylenders etc. This structure was further complicated by religious differences. A great many rural communities in the inter-war period were cut through by many dividing lines, not counting family and neighbourly conflicts.¹²⁹ The structure of "our own" and "the other" was different in different regions; however, there was always some "other".¹³⁰ It is most likely "enough to delve deeper into village matters to understand that each of them lives its own life, proceeding differently from another village, even just across the field" (Zawistowicz-Adamska 1958, p. 168), but we should not overlook the fact that "the group's antagonism towards strangers was an element of a village's unity" (Żarnowski 1973, p. 172). World War II revealed the strength of the cohesion of rural communities, but also of the antagonisms tearing them apart, when the "group" started getting rid of "the others" in various ways: Poles were getting rid of Jews (cf. Engelking 2011, Engelking, Grabowski 2018), Ukrainians in Volhynia were getting rid of Poles (cf. Beauvois 2016). Moreover, during this period some rural residents tried to get others to resolve their conflicts "with their own kind", i.e. family and neighbourly quarrels, as evidenced by denunciations to the occupying administration. The victims of such denunciations included the Ulm family from the village of Markowa in today's Podkarpackie province, who hid two Jewish families on their farm.¹³¹ The structure of antagonisms in rural communities, including the division into "our own" and "the other", changed substantially after the war. There were many reasons behind these changes. As a result of the Holocaust and territorial changes, Poland virtually became a single-nation state. The territorial changes were accompanied by great migrations, not only from "lost territories to regained territories":

¹²⁹ The minor gentry also guarded their social distinctness. They differed from the peasants in their "conceit, self-confidence, doggedness, greater arrogance ... during disputes and squabbles they called peasants louts" (Tomaszewski 1985, pp. 129–135).

¹³⁰ "Who do peasants see as being 'other'? This turns out to be an extremely wide-ranging term, not at all limited to the factors mentioned by Stomma. These might be close family, neighbours, kin, people of certain social status, children etc. There is a characteristic ambivalence here as to what counts as 'other', for instance ethnically (Gypsy, Jew, German) but also 'internally' other (a pregnant woman), or occupationally (blacksmith, miller, shoemaker, tailor), paupers, beggars, the disabled, the possessed" (Burszta 2011, p. 45).

¹³¹ In 1942, due to a denunciation (most probably motivated by the informer's financial dealings with one of the families), the Germans assisted by the Polish "blue police" executed the Ulm family: the husband, the wife (pregnant with their seventh child) and their six children as well as the two Jewish families they had been hiding – eight people in total. In the Third Republic this case became an iconic example of Polish rural residents helping Jews during the Nazi occupation.

Changes in the social structure played a role that is hard to overestimate. In the first years after the war, it was “reversed”, i.e. the position of wealthy peasants with historical *kmieć* status and traditional authority diminished (“kulaks”), while former landless peasants, owners of tiny farms and tenants gained official prestige. The latter group, who were given land under the agricultural reform, set up new farms, often in outlying settlements or hamlets, away from the village centre (Wieruszewska 2019, p. 270).

The collectivisation campaign created new divisions but also alliances, as had the post-war “time of fear” with mass rapes by Red Army soldiers, looting and banditry (Zaremba 2012).¹³²

Subsequent changes were the result of the emergence of a growing group of those working outside agriculture and peasant-labourers, which has been analysed in the first and partly in the second chapter. This initiated fundamental changes in two key rural institutions: the family and the family farm. Changes in these institutions (and others, as I will show later) weakened the previous rural cohesion and contributed to the disintegration of local communities. The growing group of people working outside agriculture, i.e. in factories and clerical jobs, introduced a varied rhythm of social time, which partially restricted the scope, subject and frequency of social contacts; the area of the mutual exchange of services shrank and the workplace was separated from the living space, thus slipping from under the local community’s control, to which working the land had been subject. The inflow of cash turned many relationships into monetised ones: the cash-free exchange of services turned into professional services, i.e. became commodified. The turn of the 20th and 21st centuries, the political transformation and European Union membership were an important period in this. These were times when rural areas underwent restructuring once again, and a new stratification and social hierarchy began to emerge.

The heterogenisation of rural communities also led to a fundamental change in interclass relations. Despite numerous divisions within rural communities and antagonism felt towards “the other” (though some manifestations of cooperation did exist), in the inter-war period a major role was played by the antagonism between “peasants” and “lords”, which was brilliantly articulated by Józef Chałasiński in *Młode pokolenie chłopów* [*The Young Generation of Peasants*] (1938). It involved a sense of inferiority and subordination on

¹³² I know of no study analysing the impact this period had on the ties in rural communities, on the emergence of widespread mistrust, trust limited only to one’s closest family, or the rural “conspiracy of silence” concerning morally reprehensible behaviours. Such tendencies are still noticeable today.

the one hand, and a sense of superiority that legitimised domination on the other. These two worlds continued to exist in rural residents’ awareness for a long time, and successive generations of officials of various ranks assumed the “lordship” role. The last 30 years have brought major changes, in my opinion. As the latest research shows (Halamska 2018), the system of interclass relationships in rural communities with a very diverse social-occupational structure is approaching the egalitarian model. However, it is still elitist in character in agrarianised communities, and the “people’s class” of farmers and labourers is still widely convinced it belongs to the “lower class”.

3. Institutions “that make the whole internally integrated...”

In the most general terms, [institutions] are relatively lasting structural and cultural systems, i.e. organised types of activity developing from the grass-roots level or specially planned, fulfilling distinctive needs of the community and individuals in a regulated manner subject to social control and social norms. Social institutions are usually understood as basic elements of social life organisation, ensuring social order, defining models of behaviour and striving to solve some fundamental problems of human existence shared by all societies (Skąpska, Ziólkowski 1998, p. 317).

The broadest meaning of this concept refers to repeatable and established behaviours, rules and rituals, when social norms have been institutionalised, i.e. turned into “a system of ‘roles/expectations’ mutually directed at each other” (ibid.), and leading to the routinisation of behaviours and expected responses. A narrower understanding refers to “organisational forms of a given set of actions ... to the people performing those actions and the set of physical equipment and means used in those actions” (ibid.). One example here might be the whole group of institutions serving agriculture, discussed in Chapter 2.¹³³

Rural communities, both a century ago and today, have been equipped with many institutions. Some of these have “always existed”, others appeared during modernisation, during the transition from a pre-industrial traditional society to a post-industrial late-modern society. The form of these institutions was influenced by the changeable main current of social life in global society,

¹³³ A third type of institution is also distinguished: total institutions, which work towards uniformising individuals and exercising complete control over them. They include prisons, monasteries and convents, boarding school dormitories, the armed forces and totalitarian states.

which either founded them or shut them down. But there are also institutions whose evolution can be observed throughout the century in question. They are institutions that commonly occur in all rural communities: the family farm, the family, the parish and the school. They are situated at the two extremes of the continuum whose poles are “rural inherence” on the one hand and “macrostructural implementation” on the other. This analysis concentrates on transformations of their forms and functions.

Chronologically speaking, the first two institutions – the peasant family and the peasant farm – can even be viewed as “endemic village institutions” that are sufficiently unique to determine the way rural communities functioned as well as being constitutive elements of their definition. The peasant family and the peasant farm formed such an indissoluble pair that one of these institutions can only be described by invoking the other. In the early 20th century these two structures dominated rural Poland, though they were not the only type of family or the only type of farm there. By definition, the traditional village community was made up of peasant families running family farms in the peasant way. The farm, its size and type of management defined the family’s place in the village structure; it was inseparably linked to the household, defined the positions within the family and the assignment of duties, the scope of cooperation within the village community, and indirectly also an individual’s position in the family and in the community. On the other side we have institutions which acquired rural qualities by functioning in a rural environment but had been introduced into this environment. Their “main rules”, i.e. goals and ways of functioning, were defined by macrostructures: the Roman Catholic Church and the state. The task of their local branches was to incorporate rural communities into the orbit of the macrostructures’ operation, also by influencing other institutions active in the rural environment.

3.1. The family farm

In various and changing forms, the family farm as a structure has always been present in rural communities. It is a social form of agricultural production organisation whose main elements – land, labour and capital occurring in different configurations – are closely tied to the family.¹³⁴ The initial form in this analysis is the peasant farm, a typical form of agricultural production

¹³⁴ The “family farm” concept was seldom used in the People’s Poland period. In the 1984 edition of *Encyklopedia ekonomiczno-rolnicza* the entry “family farm” refers readers to the entry “peasant farm”. The entry “smallholding” is cross-referenced in the same way.

in the pre-industrial stage of social development. In Poland, which was still primarily a peasant/farming country in the 1920s, it consolidated its position in the rural economy's structure. This process lasted right up until the late 1940s thanks to two different agricultural reforms (in both form and goals).¹³⁵ Things were similar in Czechoslovakia and Hungary.

A peasant farm can only exist in a specific type of social system. This has been pointed out by Hugues Lamarche (1992), who juxtaposed the model features of a peasant farm described by Chayanov (1972) with the defining features of peasant communities distinguished by Mendras (1976). On a peasant farm as an element of a non-capitalist system of production, there is a reflexive relationship between the organisation of production and the family's consumer needs; the farm produces use values, not exchange values; the work performed by the family cannot be appraised objectively.¹³⁶ For the peasant farm to function, it had to have the right environment: the rural community, which was relatively autonomous from the surrounding global society and whose economic system was relatively self-sufficient; communication between the village community and global society was ensured by influential intermediaries. The basic unit that structured this community was the family (family group), and relationships within it were based on mutual familiarity (Lamarche 1992). In such a situation, in this close connection to the family, the peasant farm became a social institution fulfilling many functions in the rural community.

"For the family, the farm was a universal, immeasurable and timeless value, i.e. it was everything: a workplace, source of income, place of residence, asset, heritage, pedigree, source of prestige and chance to be independent of others" (Kocik 1998, p. 119). It defined the economy of the rural community and was the basis of social divisions (those who had a farm vs. those who did not), networks of cooperation and clientelism as well as village stratification. Such a farm operated mainly to supply the family with produce, selling only that part which constituted a surplus or served to satisfy other needs or obligations. Sales income was spent on taxes and purchases of a limited range of manufactured goods essential on the farm or in the household. Changes in the way peasant farms functioned and the gradual decline of their typical features occurred under the influence of closer ties with the national economy:

¹³⁵ More on this issue in the previous two chapters.

¹³⁶ Jan Turowski writes: "Generally speaking, we can describe this unique structure of the traditional peasant farm using two features: 1) the farm's production focused on the family's subsistence, reproduction and consumption; 2) the leading idea behind the farm's functioning being to satisfy the family's needs, not generate income" (1992, p. 101).

intensifying contacts with the market, innovations (initially minor) coming to agriculture, and economic fluctuations. By the 1930s, peasant family farms were selling a sizable amount of their output: in the 2–3 ha group it was 48%, in the 5–10 ha group it was 58%, for the largest farms between 30 and 50 ha it was over 70%, the rest being used for reproduction and the family's consumption (Kramer 1963). Innovations, i.e. artificial fertilisers, certified seed, advanced equipment and farming machinery, were rare, although pig contracting was even introduced in 1933 (Majewski 1980). Through demand for specific kinds of produce, the market started influencing the condition of farms. It is clear that family farms were closely tied to the national economy from the enormous impact that the 1930s crisis had on them, leading to significantly reduced production on peasant farms, which was most noticeable in the best-organised sectors: dairy and pork production.

Writing about the changes that family farms have undergone, I started recreating the trajectory of our family farm, closely tied to the trajectory of my family. My grandfather Józef inherited the farm's core land (about five morgen [approx. 7 acres]) and homestead from his parents. To avoid dividing up the land, he paid off his siblings: sisters Anna, Apolonia and Waleria, and brother Wincenty. He obtained the money for this "in emigration": he stayed in France twice during the inter-war period, for a few years each time and with the family he had started. With the money earned there, he built a new house and barn right after the war. My grandmother Wiktoria had contributed a small parcel of land in Trzebol, a few kilometres away. My grandparents cultivated this several-morgen acreage right up to 1954, i.e. my grandfather's illness. Throughout the post-war period my grandfather made some extra money selling dairy products.

In 1954 the farm was taken over by my parents, Janina and Władysław, the latter contributing another 1 ha of land. The farm developed, seeking out profitable areas of production (pigs and cattle, berry bushes, vegetables and flower seedlings), hiring people from time to time. During this whole period my father was a part-time peasant-clerical worker. In the mid-1960s my parents decided to build new farm buildings. Despite the necessary materials having been amassed (typically for construction projects in People's Poland: to start building it was sensible to obtain all the basic building materials first, so as not to have to halt a project for lack of them), the plan never came to fruition due to my father's tragic death in 1967. My mother, helped by my school-age brothers Tadeusz and Artur, continued running the farm with skill, demanding that the authorities put "farmer" and not "housewife" in her ID. At the same time, having completed the required course, she ran a cattle insemination centre. The peak of this development came with the purchase of a tractor: an object of farmers' dreams and envy, a symbol of success. My mother's illness and then death (1987) changed the farm, which was taken over by

my brother, who had graduated from agricultural university by then and was already working outside the farm. Over a few weeks, he shut down the animal breeding segment and left only crop production. Later, after he married a woman from Kraków, he tried pig farming, but subsequently gave it up. He continued to grow and sell cereal crops until he fell ill a few years ago; in the statistics, his three-hectare farm was listed among those “specialised in crop production”. Today the land is being worked as a “squat lease” by another farmer from a village a few kilometres away, as no one in the vicinity was interested; most of the land in this hamlet, Pasieka on the River Vistula (and today along Wiślana Street), is lying fallow.

From World War II right up until 1989, the process of change involving peasant farms proceeded in special conditions. The quotas introduced by the occupying Germans in 1940 were continued after the war in the form of compulsory deliveries, which were in force up to 1972. Part of farms’ yield was forcibly “marketised”, which significantly restricted freedom of operation (in the first half of the 1950s this part was so large that it prevented farm reproduction). Between World War II and 1990, the economy in which family farms functioned was centrally planned and prices were set administratively. The state pursued a policy of repressive tolerance towards family farming (which the authorities called “individual farming”), oscillating between oppression and consent. Farms continued to be the foundation of village stratification, but the power of their social labelling gradually decreased. Labelling became a special feature in the 1950s, when wealthy farmers (*kmieć*) were “rebranded” as kulaks, which meant their official degradation, while the *biedniak* (poor man) category was glamorised as having identical interests with the working class.¹³⁷ The situation of farms did not stabilise until the early 1970s, when it turned out that “every farm that produces for the market is socialist”.¹³⁸ Farms did not gain permanent legal guarantees until 1983. The way in which peasant family farms opened to external influences, i.e. the national economy and global society, was imposed on them on the one hand (compulsory deliveries) while being determined by the rules of centrally controlled rationing on the other.

¹³⁷ These propaganda clichés became long-lasting elements of colloquial speech and social awareness. Furthermore, “not having anything” was a condition thanks to which families and individuals were above suspicion of class disloyalty, and therefore gave them the right to expect various welfare benefits. Besides, in a way, finding the *biedniak* category sanctioned the existence of poverty (only) in rural Poland, since social relations there were “not socialist”.

¹³⁸ Quoted from a speech by Edward Gierek, First Secretary of the PZPR (ruling communist party) Central Committee in 1970–1980.

The average marketisation changed steadily compared to the inter-war period,¹³⁹ but was very varied. Farms' cash income was small, because under the compulsory delivery system produce was "sold" to the state at low prices, whereas farms also had certain cash obligations to fulfil. There was little consumption pressure, since the consumer goods market was very modest. A process of group technical modernisation (or "tractorialisation") began in the second half of the 1950s,¹⁴⁰ which farmers regarded with a great deal of mistrust. Other elements modernising farm management, such as artificial fertilisers, innovations like new crop varieties and livestock breeds, a new system of production organisation in the form of contracting as well as agricultural consultancy, were introduced in the 1960s. However, even then, horses were the main pulling power in family farming, employment was very high, production intensity was low, while commodification barely exceeded 40% of family farms' gross output. However, a new factor affecting changes on family farms came into play during this period: the mass opportunity to work outside the farm. The result was the emergence of a new type of family farm: farms run by families in which a member or members worked outside agriculture. This restructured the family's earlier ties to the farm. On the one hand, it enabled families to become partially independent of their farm for income and reduced the labour resources tied to the farm. The work organisation in the family changed as a consequence, the duties of absentees being taken over by the other family members, or extra hands occasionally being hired. This often led to changes in the farm's production structure, i.e. its simplification and the reduction of time-consuming segments. On the other hand, non-agricultural income helped families invest in their farms and modernise them; it was a non-loan source of capital, without which the modernisation of agriculture is impossible. Working outside agriculture changed the local labour resources, too, and thus also the structure of relationships between farms, causing the previous clientelist ties to weaken. It was not until the 1970s that the transformation of farms accelerated. The key moment was the abolition of compulsory deliveries (1972), the emergence of possibilities for individual (private) mechanisation, the launch of investment loans for family farms and a farm specialisation programme. However, the changes were impeded by the limited supply of manufactured goods (especially machinery) and their administrative distribution as well as the blocked farmland market

¹³⁹ Zbigniew Adamowski (1988) writes that in 1961–1965 commodification stood at 40.9% of gross output, in 1971–1975 it was 44.2%, and 49.1% in 1981–1985.

¹⁴⁰ Cf. Chapter 2 on this, in the fragments about farmers' associations.

and the 50 ha legal limit in farm area (introduced by the agricultural reform decree in 1944).¹⁴¹ As regards foodstuffs, demand continued to exceed supply (the shortage economy), which was not conducive to any improvement in food quality.

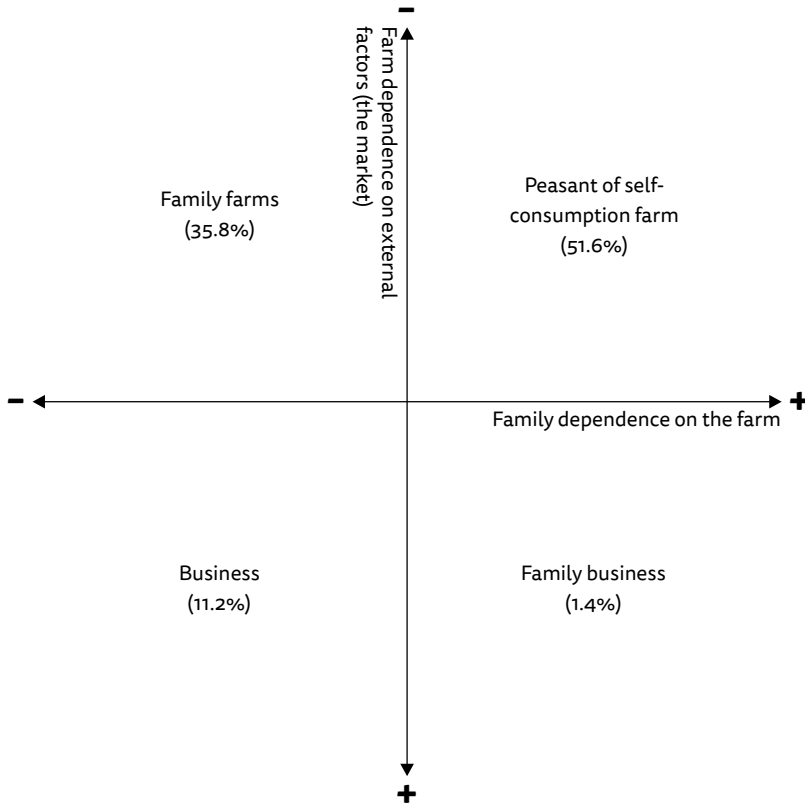


Figure 20.
Family farm types 1988

Source: own work based on Lamarche 2002a.

The trajectories of change on farms in People’s Poland were varied, which resulted in the development of different types of farm, the particularly predominant type being “post-traditional peasant farms” (Kochanowicz 1992). If we assume that a family farm was defined by two fundamental features: the family’s subordination to its running and autonomy in relation to the outside

¹⁴¹ It should be remembered that farms of over 15 ha accounted for just 6% of all individual (private) farms in 1990.

world, then changes in these particular features and their mutual relations led to the formation of the above-mentioned post-traditional types. Invoking the simplest combinations of relations between these two features, alongside the peasant type (or foodstuff type – self-consumption) we can distinguish three other types: the family farm, the family business and the business.

The most frequent type, according to research from 1988 (Lamarche 2002a), was the self-consumption peasant farm. This was characterised by a familial logic of operation and a high degree of independence from external factors (the market, loans). The next most frequent type was the modernised family farm, with substantial autonomy and the family's much weaker subordination to its operation than was the case on the peasant farm. The main explanation for the mass occurrence of these two types is the wide incidence of farm owners or family members working outside the farm, bringing in income and forcing the way the farm operated to be adjusted to the family's capacity in terms of people and time. On the other hand, however, a family's ties to the farm were strengthened by the great importance of self-consumption in a situation of market shortages. Family businesses did not emerge, but a ninth of the farms showed qualities enabling them to be considered businesses: they were relatively advanced technologically, pursued quite intensive farming and were oriented towards market production. All of these farms were closely linked to the centrally planned economy; the connection was one of symbiosis (Halamska 1995). The post-communist transformation revealed their limited ability to function in a market economy. In a spectacular process, even market-oriented farms reverted to the peasant type (Halamska, Lamarche, Maurel 2003). Their family character enabled them temporarily to absorb the labour resources freed by the transformation of industry. In that period (the first half of the 1990s), farms started serving their families – both nuclear and extended – as an institution offering security. This labour transfer did not result in the lasting repeasantisation of agriculture, but did herald “the end of the peasants” (Halamska 2005). Some farms, especially larger and modernised ones, tied themselves more closely to the market and began operating according to its dictate; a much greater number started losing touch with the market, forming communities of quasi-peasant (seemingly peasant) and market-supporting farms that brought families supplementary income.

New conditions for change emerged in the European Union pre-accession process and after accession in 2004. A trend noticeable from the 1990s, when the number of farms decreased (from about 2.17 million in 1990 to about 1.425 million in 2018, mainly the smallest farms up to 5 ha), weakened

at the end of the first decade of the 21st century. Most likely, according to Krzysztof Gorlach and Zbigniew Drąg (2019), this was due to the stabilising influence of direct payments from the EU. It indirectly blocked the market for land, slowing down farms’ growth in size. A panel study conducted by the above authors from 1994 to 2017 shows the peasant features of family farms fading, as manifested in a withdrawal from multiple-direction production in favour of simplification and specialisation, a greater share of supra-local markets in purchases and sales, and growth in the familial nature of labour coupled with a lower number of those working on the farm. The authors conclude that the dominant types are the “modernised peasant farm”, i.e. with one of the features of a farming business, and the “peasant farm”, which has none of those features.¹⁴² Such farms, which I consider to be quasi-peasant rather than peasant farms, predominate among family farms. They are small farms of no more than 5 ha and almost all of them have income from other sources. This means that the family’s ties with the farm, which is no longer the sole source of income, are rather casual; elements of tradition are features of secondary importance here. Only a quarter of family farms come close to the family-business type (“farming business”); these are larger farms, important to the family as its only or main source of income, which have lost the qualities ascribed to the peasant kind of farm management.

3.2. The rural family

The starting point of this analysis is the peasant family, i.e. the dominant though not the only¹⁴³ type of family in rural Poland in the early 20th century. It had extensive functions that “covered the production function as the main one, the procreative function,¹⁴⁴ the educational, integrative-expressive (i.e. emotional), religious, cultural, recreational and security functions” (Turowski 1992, p. 138). The family was a production, legal, social and political institution (cf. Marody, Giza-Poleszczuk 2004). Its characterisations note its

¹⁴² In my opinion, this last type are in fact quasi-peasant farms because almost all of them have non-agricultural sources of income for the family, which determines their special way of functioning. My thesis that the “Polish end of the peasantry” is unique is founded on their mass emergence (Halamska 2004).

¹⁴³ This is due to the social-occupational structure of the rural population, because alongside peasants, rural inhabitants included landless, hired manual labourers, farm labourers and industrial workers as well as the intelligentsia and landowners. Cf. Chapter 1.

¹⁴⁴ Mirosława Marody and Anna Giza-Poleszczuk (2004, Chapter 6) understand the reproduction process broadly, with the reproduction of the population as just one element. In addition, the process of reproduction in the family also covers structures of the social, economic and political (power) order.

three-generation form. Sometimes it was a “household group” (Mendras 1976) because, alongside grandparents, parents and their children, it also included other relatives: family bachelors, unmarried sisters, aunts etc. as well as servants. This was a patriarchal and authoritarian family, subject to control from kin and neighbours, in which the independence of the small (elementary, nuclear) family was slight. The family structure stemmed from the structure of the farm: the position on the farm determined the roles in the family, which also depended on sex and age (Michalska 2019). Changes in peasant families accelerated in the late 1940s due to a variety of factors: emigration from rural areas, the development of non-agricultural ways of making a living, diminished wealth differences, people having multiple occupations and agriculture’s progressive integration into the national economy (cf. Kocik 1998). Such changes were common in the world at the time and are described as a process of transitioning from a large, multigenerational family to a nuclear family. In Poland this process had a unique quality: the nuclear family did emerge from the extended family, but this was not a widespread trend. Several types of family developed, a process influenced by the changing social-occupational structure. Apart from peasant families, Jan Turowski (1992) distinguished farming families, farming-working families, rural working (working class) families and suburban families.¹⁴⁵ The first two types, i.e. farming and farming-working families, had a “direct” relation to peasant families.

The process by which the peasant family transformed into the farming family was complicated, as the transition involved changes in the family farm and in the village community. Lucjan Kocik distinguished several stages in this transformation, described by terms such as democratisation, egalitarianisation and partnership. This involved a process “of separating social roles from the position occupied in the family work team, whereas the formation of a partnership structure [is understood as] the disappearance of formalised distances between family members” (Kocik 1998, p. 123). This means that individualisation of the peasant family occurred, and the changing relationships with the rural community were all-important in this, limiting its influence on the organisation of the family’s life and its functioning. This is noticeable in the changing rules of matrimonial selection,¹⁴⁶ attitudes towards extra-marital births, the appearance and intensification of divorces and relationships

¹⁴⁵ I omit this type from my discussion, as it covers the family types mentioned earlier.

¹⁴⁶ However, according to Henryk Domański these changes were small in farming families: “As regards the matrimonial model, this was an endogamic circle in which the level of ‘matrimonial self-recruitment’ oscillated around 70%, according to data for 2002” (Domański 2005a, p. 42).

not confirmed by any formal contract. Continuing to fulfil its production functions, the farming family gradually relaxed the ties between household and farm. The share of independent small families increased in this type as well, though there was still a significant proportion of families representing transitional forms (Markowska 1965, p. 117 et seq.). These included a situation where, until it could become independent, the nuclear family temporarily formed a single household with the family of origin. In a different case, the nuclear family might become the dominant family while still forming a single household and a single farm with the family of origin. Sometimes these were separate households, but with ties through the farm, which could assume various forms. Such farming families, i.e. three-generation or extended, with different relationships between the nuclear family and the family of origin, still exist today. Transforming from a peasant family into a farming family also changed the family's functions. Some roles diminished as they were taken over by other groups or institutions (e.g. the educational and security functions), others gained greater autonomy while also intensifying, one example being the integrative-expressive function (Markowska 1964). The changes in functions were thus not linear but multidirectional.

The formation of working-farming families, which were called labourer-peasant families in People's Poland, followed a different trajectory. Working in jobs outside the usually small farm supported the continuance of the three-generation family. Double employment inclined young people to maintain lasting ties with the family of origin, which was manifested in a shared home, household and farm. The proportion of this type of family was substantial, in view of the popularity of the dual-occupation trend (cf. Chapter 1). In a way, this family type fossilised the functions of the traditional three-generation family while at the same time redefining its production functions and its inner structure. It was quite an attractive type of family, and dual-occupation parents often indicated it as desirable for their children as late as the 1980s.

The Polish countryside has always included rural working (working class) families as well, although their share was not significant in the early 20th century. These were families of farm labourers, who leaned towards the peasant lifestyle, but also families of non-agricultural labourers and craftsmen. The latter were usually found in more industrialised regions. Edward Pietraszek (1969) estimated that in Krakowskie province in 1960¹⁴⁷ the non-agricultural population accounted for over a half of the structure in about a third of villages.

¹⁴⁷ A region comparable to today's Małopolskie province.

Progressive industrialisation popularised this family type in the countryside. Today's estimates say that non-farmers account for three-quarters of the rural population, though this share is different in different regions. The rural employee (not necessarily working class) family has become the main type of rural family in contemporary times. The great majority of these families originated from farming-peasant and farming-working families. In view of their background and the fact of living in the countryside, they cultivated small farm plots, often only for self-supply. The scale of this trend increased considerably during the crisis in the 1980s, marked by nationwide food shortages, especially meat.¹⁴⁸ From the 1990s, great numbers of rural working families stopped cultivating their allotments, practically ceasing to work the land at all. The fashion for organic produce from one's own garden was only just emerging, and was often brought by immigrating urban dwellers. Extended, three-generation families were also quite widespread among this type, because if spouses worked outside the home, "the nuclear family would be unable to fulfil its functions without maintaining ties or even a joint economy and household with the family of origin" (Turowski 1992, p. 146).¹⁴⁹

Progressive individualisation was an important element of these changes, as the lives of a growing proportion of the rural population no longer relied on the farm. This process began with the autonomisation of children. Compulsory education gradually released them from working on the farm, while the opening of non-agricultural labour markets created opportunities for people to emigrate from agriculture, and in the case of young people also from the countryside. "The autonomisation of children, especially young adults, is manifested in their education, choice of occupation, in forms of spending leisure time and participating in culture" (ibid., p. 143). The autonomisation of women began at a later stage. Crisis situations (war, men working outside the farm, unemployment) have always increased their importance in the family. The autonomisation of the nuclear family liberated them from the domination of the older generation. The widespread pursuit of careers (frequent in rural working families) and assuming public functions was also of great importance. "The importance of individual preferences is undoubtedly increasing; a stronger drive to ensure satisfaction for the individual is observed; subordination to the family group or the good of the farm as an overriding value is decreasing"

¹⁴⁸ People with over 0.5 ha of land were not entitled to a meat ration.

¹⁴⁹ This was due to long commutes to work, but also a deficit of care facilities for children: few kindergartens and a negligible number of crèches. Today we need to add the shortage of care facilities for the elderly to the mix.

(Michalska 2019, p. 316). In their declarations, most rural residents favour the partnership family model (or a modified version of it), but few say it is the model that their own family is implementing (Michalska 2020). Rural (and Polish) families continue to be very patriarchal, and this model is still being passed on.

Contemporary families in the countryside are rural working families; about half the rural families make a living from jobs outside the farm, while just 13% live off their farm. A new kind of family has also appeared in rural areas: old-age and disability pensioner families, accounting for about a third of rural families. This is a visible effect of the ageing of society, but also one of the indicators of change in rural families over the past century: the disintegration of three-generation families, the autonomisation of nuclear families and the family’s decreasing security function. At present about 15% of rural families are three-generation; families with three or more children (which are classified as large families) make up about 10%. Apart from single-parent families (about 10%), it is worth noting a new form of family: cohabitation. These families are not numerous (1.5%),¹⁵⁰ but some of them are part of the “single-parent” category, as indicated by the high proportion of extramarital births: over 20% in 2015. Changes in the rural family are also illustrated by the number of divorces: in 1998 there were 82 divorces per 1,000 new marriages, in 2015 it was 226.7 divorces (GUS 2018). Despite many changes and the fragmentation of social bonds, which has also affected the family as an institution, the family is an extraordinarily complex entity: a unit of reproduction in a broad sense, a household, a “political” unit where “the collective will” is worked out and where “the common good” appears (Marody, Giza-Poleszczuk 2004, p. 188).

3.3. The parish

Parishes are religious institutions: this is a frequent but not the only possible approach to analysing the parish. Wojciech Sadłoń (2019, p. 352 et seq.) points out its unique nature, stemming from the fact that it is impossible to analyse this institution without accounting for faith and piety, which in this case is additionally unique to Polish popular religiousness. “Despite definitional problems, thanks to texts assuming an ethnographic perspective by authors such as William Thomas and Florian Znaniecki (1918–1920; Polish edition 1976), we can indicate the typical features of traditional popular piety focused

¹⁵⁰ Own estimates based on Social Diagnosis 2015 data.

around the parish. To the above authors, the characteristics of popular piety include the belief that daily life is permeated by spiritual forces, both good and evil". Popular piety in rural parishes was later also discussed by Jan Bystróż (1936). Stefan Czarnowski characterised popular piety as religiousness that is largely ritualistic and sensualistic, intertwined with national identity (the Pole-Catholic), representing the supernatural world with the help of symbols and peasant culture patterns (Czarnowski 1956, pp. 88–107, 1946, pp. 121–152).¹⁵¹ Subsequent authors, first and foremost Władysław Piwowarski (1971) and Zbigniew T. Wierzbicki (1979), used this concept to underline the experiencing part of religiousness, which they distinguish from religious knowledge. Popular piety in conjunction with the parish was also studied by Edward Ciupak (1961). In the context of a century of change in the parish as an institution, it is worth remembering these unique qualities of rural popular piety (which does not end in the countryside). As Czarnowski defined them, its main features still exist today, though they are named and interpreted in many different ways.¹⁵² "The popular character of rural religiousness, a constantly evolving product of a specific milieu, which should not be equated exclusively with contemporary rural religiousness, still appears as a useful category for describing rural parishes, even if this religiousness needs to be called 'organic religiousness'" (Rogaczewska 2015, p. 39).

According to Mariański (1984), the parish enables Catholics to maintain their bond with the Church as an institution. The Church is an institution with a hierarchic structure, and the parish is its lowest organisational level. Parishes form deaneries, deaneries form dioceses, which are subordinate to the metropolitan see. The leader of the parish, i.e. the parish priest appointed by and subordinate to his bishop, enjoys a special position. In the spirit of Mendras' "Janus-faced personage" (*Janus bifrons* – Mendras 1976, p. 106), he is an intermediary between the institution of the Catholic Church and the community of parishioners. The way he fulfils this role, whether oriented towards

¹⁵¹ The conference *Religiousness and National Membership in Central and Eastern Europe* was held in Warsaw in 2017. Research covering 19 countries conducted by the Pew Research Centre in the United States shows that a link between religious and national identity is found throughout the region, but is much weaker in Roman Catholic than in Orthodox countries. "Being a Catholic" is very or quite important to 64% of respondents in Poland. This is the highest percentage among countries considered to be majority Roman Catholic (<https://ekai.pl/konferencja-o-religijności-w-europie-srodkowo-wschodniej> (retrieved 2020-07-18)).

¹⁵² Anna Królikowska (2014) analyses multiple meanings of the concept of "popular religiousness". Universal religiousness and elite religiousness are notions that are in opposition to it. For this reason, and when it is additionally described as "primitive" or "vulgar", it is attributed to peasants, but also to "the people" understood as the nation. Without a doubt, it is an ambiguous concept with multiple-meanings.

the hierarchic institution of the Church or the parish community of which he is the leader, defines the character of the parish's functioning as an institution. The parish priest is an intermediary in the transmission of religious content coming from the head office of the Catholic Church as an institution; such content goes through several levels of the organisational structure and can be modified at each one. This is important for understanding the uniqueness of Polish religiousness, because throughout the 100 years under consideration, the Catholic religion was turned into a national element, the religious message included other content as well, e.g. delegitimising left-wing and liberal ideas, and some interpretations of strictly religious teachings were very different from the intentions of the institution's head office. The way the intermediation is fulfilled is also determined by the intermediary's personal qualities: background, education, age, motivation for choosing the priesthood as a vocation etc. On the other hand, a priest transmitting any content has to account for the social and demographic features of the community he is addressing. This is a homogeneous community in some respects (baptised residents), and a varied one in others (age, social structure etc.). In view of the hierarchic nature of the Catholic Church, we need to consider its relationships with the macrostructures of the state and society. The century under analysis included three qualitatively different periods in relations between the state and the Catholic Church. In two of them, from 1925 to 1945 and then after 1993, these relations were regulated by a concordat, while the period between 1945 and 1992 had no such regulation. The relations in the People's Poland period were not friendly, but it would be an over-simplification to apply today's claim that they were hostile to the entire period.¹⁵³ As for relations with society, it is worth underlining that on the eve of Poland's regained independence, Catholicism was perceived as an element of national identity and the Church as a symbolic defender of the nation against Protestant Germany and Orthodox Russia. In the People's Poland period, when it symbolised resistance to the authorities, it became a very strong social institution (cf. Rogaczewska 2015, pp. 17–20). A special role in this was played by the 1980s, when the Church supported the activity of the democratic opposition in various ways and had large amounts

¹⁵³ This is indicated by the number of churches built (with some difficulty) during this period, the collaboration between the communist authorities and the Episcopate on setting up a new church administration in the Regained Territories, and mediation in contacts between the government and the opposition in the 1980s. It is also worth remembering that sometimes the Catholic Church took the authorities' side, one example being Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński's homily in August 1980 expressing disapproval of the striking workers.

of material aid for the population at its disposal. The latter form of support was especially important in rural parishes.

The institution of the parish also fulfils internal functions in a territorially defined community. Janusz Majka (1969) points to a distinctive feature of this territorial community: it has an actual and a potential aspect. The actual parish comprises only baptised people; potentially, given the parish's missionary function, people who have not been baptised can become its members in future. This definitional quality of the parish as a community of baptised people also defines the rule of exclusion: the unbaptised remain outside the parish community; this is the basis for defining "the other", i.e. a non-member of the rural community. Historically, parish community leaders were largely indifferent to displays of hostility towards Jews as "the other".¹⁵⁴ This had to affect the behaviour of the rural population towards Jews during the German occupation: alongside indifference, which was the most frequent, there was not only (rare) assistance, but also not infrequent hostility (cf. Engelking 2011; Obirek 2019). Such hostility was also shown by priests.¹⁵⁵ In view of the authority enjoyed by the Church and priests in rural communities at the time, such an attitude had to have a powerful influence. Another group marginalised or excluded from parish communities in the inter-war period was anticlerical peasantry. The peasant leader Wincenty Witos' (1988) and the radical rural activist Jan Stryczek's (1984) clashes with the clergy have been well described. After World War II, especially up to the 1956 breakthrough in relations between Church and state, the communists were an understandable enemy, though not directly named as such at the time. In parishes, these were mainly the people appointed to the local authorities, who were obliged to hold "a materialistic world view". This communist stigmatisation, as I remember, did not really affect relations within the community, but then the local rural dignitaries' hostile actions towards the Church were not frequent, especially in the latter years of People's Poland.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁴ And a large part of the clergy, also of peasant descent, openly supported the (nationalist) National Democracy and its slogans.

¹⁵⁵ The following account is one example: "The priest from his pulpit spoke about the Jews on many occasions and gave fervent thanks to God for ridding us of those parasites once and for all. They were grateful to Hitler for his dirty work" (Engelking 2011, p. 104).

¹⁵⁶ I think this might have been due to a mechanism slightly similar to that described by Leder in *Prześlona rewolucja [Sleepwalking Through a Revolution]* (2014): hostile actions against the clergy were often perceived as a sign of rational behaviour on the part of people representing the authorities, i.e. as one of the "forced" behaviours of communist party members, given that people in their families were often practising Catholics. Most of the harsh anti-communist rhetoric did not appear in rural areas until after 1989.

The parish gathered together believers who professed the same faith. ... The religious life of parishes in the early 20th century was very developed and permeated virtually all areas of the rural community's life. Together, parishioners celebrated festivities specified by the Church, which were intertwined with the rhythm of work on the land. ... The most important events in people's lives were a part of parish life, from births, through marriages, all the way to a religious funeral (Sadłoń 2019, p. 359).

Such transitional moments were accompanied by a set of special, “localised”, “visible symbols and material instruments of that unity” (Thomas, Znaniecki 1976, p. 220): the church building and the cemetery. The parish was also a framework for neighbourly assistance provided to fellow parishioners who had suffered misfortune. It was also here that peasants or squires had a local forum bigger than just the village to confirm their status, since they had their better or inferior place of honour in the church, and their richer or more modest setting for religious rituals. The status-defining aspect of these rituals has survived to the present day in a mass form, often losing much of its religious significance. Meanwhile, in People's Poland new reasons to identify with the parish were provided by the state's anti-Church policy: ostentatious religious practices were a (safe) way of expressing dissent against the existing political order. This is confirmed not only by anecdotes from that period,¹⁵⁷ but also by the increase in religious practices in the 1980s. As many researchers show (Ciupak 1961; Gałaj 1978; Mariański 1983), it was a period when the parish “stopped being the universe organising social life” and when “parochial exclusivism, manifested in a sense of the uniqueness and distinctness of one's own parish among the rest, grew weaker” (Sadłoń 2019, p. 375). In our times, the relationships between rural residents and parishes are evolving. The character of religiousness itself is changing: it is becoming less ritual and more individualistic, “de-churched” and “de-parochialised”. The group of rural residents not involved in religion was estimated at 28% in 2015 (Bieńkuńska, Piasecki 2017, p. 122). Citing his own research in the Drohiczyn diocese, Sadłoń (2019) claims that parish membership has local connotations and that residents perceive the parish as their own local community. One can presume that these stances towards the parish vary depending on the frequency of religious practices. Those perceiving the parish as a local community are most likely from the group of systematic religious practitioners (slightly over

¹⁵⁷ The following anecdote was very popular: In church during the Elevation of the Host, two elderly men do not kneel but remain standing. “Are you an unbeliever too?”, asks one. The other replies: “No, I've got bad knees”.

50% of rural residents), rather than those who practise irregularly, seldom or not at all, which is related to their attitude towards religion: an attachment only to religious tradition, indifference towards it or a lack of faith (though they might not display this in the countryside).

The rural parish is a special institution of the territorial community due to the “popular” character of religiousness and because it is the lowest level in the Church’s hierarchic structure; today it is bound together not so much by faith, perhaps, as by membership of the Catholic Church. As an institution, this has long fulfilled important functions towards individuals and the whole community. As regards individuals, the parish has an educational function, using religious instruction to transmit the rules of the catechism and the norms stemming from them. The most important element in this is the interpretation of those rules, which is strongly influenced by individual levels of the hierarchic structure: sometimes the local interpretation might be far from the intentions of the head office, or even contradict the ideas of Christianity. This applies to religious instruction for children and teenagers, but also to preparations and settings of rituals of passage: communion, confirmation, marriage or funerals, which have acquired non-religious, social meanings. This is the way in which not only people’s religious competences have been and still are shaped, but also their views about the world and their own place within it. These competences include “the ability of self-management”, especially useful in crisis situations. It is a way of acquiring religious capital “through which one can organise not only one’s spiritual sphere better, but also other spheres of life, e.g. the rhythm of time, decision-making, the development of character and resistance to failure, managing various assets and different life options” (Rogaczewska 2015, p. 24).

The parish and the parish church is also a place for “providing services”: it is where parishioners baptise their children, receive their First Communion and are confirmed, often getting married in the same parish and later, after funeral rites, being laid to rest in the parish cemetery. As Stanisław Obirek remarks: “All of the most important events in my life and the life of my family thus occurred and still occur in a church context. There is no other possibility. I think it is the same in most rural families in Poland” (Obirek 2019, p. 560). This state of affairs has existed “forever”. The character of most religious ceremonies has changed over the past century: baptisms are now in groups, First Communion comes with an opulent secular setting, weddings and funerals are also sumptuous affairs. They have additionally become an opportunity for families to confirm their social status with the help of ostentatious family consumption accompanying these religious events.

3.4. The school

In the foundation act of the Zamoyski Academy, set up in 1594, Jan Zamoyski wrote: “Such will be the Republic as the upbringing of its young”. Schools have played a special role in this “upbringing”, as a unique kind of institution, linking rural communities to the state and, above all, serving as an institution through which the state influences rural society.

The category that best describes the relationships between the school and the state is subordination. In the two inter-war decades this meant being subordinate to the nation: schools were meant to incorporate rural residents, the group who probably least identified with it, into the Polish nation. During the People’s Poland period, the subordinate nature of schools stemmed from the communist ideology, which assumed the transformation of the character of Polish society from a peasant to a worker society. In the Third Republic the role of rural schools involved incorporating the countryside into the transformation processes which Polish society was undergoing after 1990 (Domalewski 2019, p. 389).

In view of its significant role in socialisation, the school was and is an institution shaping the type of citizen that is desired by the state in a given period; that citizen model might be compatible with the models propagated by other socialisation institutions or in opposition to them. At the same time, schools have always been an instrument of the macrostructure’s penetration of local communities, influencing the condition and character of rural communities and the ties within them, and initiating social processes.

Influencing society through schools relies on their wide availability and accessibility. In view of the differences in regulations between Polish territories once lying in different partitions, in 1919 the Polish state issued a decree on compulsory education for children aged 7–14. The needs were enormous, given that in 1921 about two-fifths of the rural population was illiterate. The education system was of a dual character: mass education at the elementary level (in small schools with one or two teachers) and elite education with a wider curriculum, preparing pupils for further education (middle school plus secondary school). This dual system was not changed by the 1932 reform introducing three organisational levels of primary school and three curriculum stages. Although the aim of this reform was to introduce a full seven-class primary school everywhere, even in the 1938/1939 school year almost half the children in rural areas attended small elementary schools. The idea of egalitarian

education was put into practice in People's Poland, and a uniform curriculum was introduced in all primary schools as early as 1945. Compulsory education was extended to 16 years of age in 1956, and completing seven classes of primary school was made mandatory. The next amendment was introduced in 1961: an eight-year primary school and compulsory education extended until the age of 17. The law also specified the character of primary schools: from then on, they were uniform, free of charge, public and secular. Religious instruction was taken out of schools and moved to church-run religious education rooms. Work on a new model of the education system began in 1971, but no structural reform of the school system was implemented. The only element that changed the structure of the rural school network was the introduction of collective *gmina*/commune schools in 1973, which lowered the organisational level of many rural elementary schools in localities that were not *gmina* "capitals". The school system underwent numerous changes after 1989: schools were granted greater autonomy, religious instruction returned to schools in 1992, the upkeep of all schools was taken over by communes in 1996, and the 1997 Polish Constitution introduced compulsory education until the age of 18. It became possible to organise non-public schools that charged fees. A reform of the school system's organisation was implemented in 1999. It introduced a six-year primary school supplemented by a three-year middle school. The rural school network was reorganised again. This was not the last change in the century under analysis. The next one, which took place in 2017, restored the eight-year primary school.

The wide availability and accessibility of schools was a question of creating equal educational opportunities, which decided the possibility of people's social advancement. The inter-war primary school, which involved many different organisational types with varying curricula, did not guarantee such equal opportunities. Rural schools at the low organisational level, with a limited curriculum, offered no basis for further education in secondary school. The chances for young people in rural areas to complete a higher level of education were structurally blocked. Those chances were not levelled out by the primary schools of People's Poland and their unified curriculum, the reasons for this included financial and staff shortages (negative selection to the teaching profession, the teaching career's reduced prestige, feminisation coupled with a very traditional perception of women's role in families and households). Rural schools were "mainly smaller in terms of the number of pupils and working teachers. In this, the fact of the existence of small schools in rural areas would not have been a problem if their material situation had been comparable with

that characterising schools in towns/cities” (Domalewski 2019, p. 399). The noticeably poorer learning outcomes were strongly influenced by the cultural capital of inadequately educated rural communities (Kwieciński 1972; Winclawski 1973). However, these disparities and impairments were treated as something natural (Kozakiewicz 1989); as a way of trying to compensate for them, “extra points for a worker or peasant family background” were introduced in the 1960s for university enrolment. Particularly in the 1950s and 1960s, education was focused on vocational training and preparing a workforce (also from the countryside) for developing industry. In fact, industry and slowly growing cities absorbed most of the young people from rural areas with a vocational education.

Rural schools became places of a special kind of conflict because, on the one hand, this institution fulfilled the role of a “transmission belt” supplying rural residents to rapidly developing industry and cities, while on the other the effects of its work, and thus the “quality of material delivered”, were meagre (Domalewski 2019, p. 400).

There was a dual function involved: on the one hand, schools prepared youngsters to leave the countryside, but on the other, due to the low teaching standard at many of them, they forced some young people to stay in their rural area. Possibilities to level out educational opportunities were created later by the 1989 breakthrough, the fragmentary changes in the school system that occurred as a result, and the 1999 reform of the education system. One of its goals was to even out the educational opportunities of the young rural population. For the first time in the 100-year history of rural education, it was openly indicated that the aim was also to achieve “growth of the value of a rural education and young people’s educational aspirations, and unblock structural channels of access to education by propagating secondary and tertiary education” (ibid., p. 410). As a result of this “educational revolution”, the number of youngsters from rural areas attending secondary school and enrolling in universities grew significantly. “Never before had the distance between the education paths of rural and urban young people been so small” (ibid, p. 412).

Changes in the structure of primary education came with changes in the content being taught. In the 100 years between 1918 and 2018, public primary schools were secular for just 30 years, from 1961 to 1992. Over the remaining period, even though Poland was not and is not a religious state, religion was taught in schools. It remains an open question whether the content passed on

by these two institutions, i.e. the state and the Catholic Church, was consistent. In the Third Republic this question has gained additional significance: is the message coming from institutions of a democratic state compatible with that being passed on by the undemocratic, patriarchal and hierarchic institution of the Catholic Church? In the periods when religious instruction was provided in schools as part of the curriculum, the distinction between religious instruction and the teachings of the Church was vague. Education reforms were most often accompanied by curriculum changes, and the former would frequently be a pretext for the latter. The state's influence on school curricula is part of the political system: through the curriculum, the government informs us what kind of citizens it wants, what things people should be proud of or ashamed of. The principal task of rural schools in the inter-war period was to develop a sense of national identity in the peasant population, who had not really identified with the nation before. The content taught in this context was a rather peculiar vision of Polish culture and the Polish nation: "in the course of Poland's entire history, from Mieszko I to the present day, peasants are portrayed as a passive, uncreative mass that in itself has directly contributed nothing positive to any area of national life" (Chałasiński 1938, pp. 63–78). This narrative, equating national culture with the culture of the higher/dominant classes, degraded local culture and deprecated the countryside as a place to live. This led to the corrosion of traditional peasant culture, but at the same time opened rural communities up to the values and norms of the national society. Although different in its ideological message, the narrative in the People's Poland period changed little in this respect. Schools were meant to shape the "new people" and teaching was to be based on Marxist-Leninist foundations. Alumni were to believe in the superiority of socialism over capitalism, associate patriotism with internationalism, have fraternal feelings for the Soviet Union and be critical towards "bourgeois Poland". Rural – basically peasant – areas were backward, and for centuries the landowners, and in the new reality the *kulaks*, had been responsible for this. Even though the sharpness of this socialisation narrative started weakening in the 1960s, the only time the majority of Polish people saw the countryside as a better place to live than the city was 1981, a year of crisis (food shortages). Much of the population, including rural residents, associated the countryside with hard work, poverty, a lack of civilisational amenities as well as ignorance and crudeness. A rural family background was not cause for pride; rather, it was carefully concealed. Schools were given quite substantial autonomy in the Third Republic and could shape their curricula quite flexibly. The previous ideological message was thoroughly

revised: overnight, severe criticism was directed against “communist Poland” while the Second Republic and its heroes were held in high esteem. One symbol of this might be the change in the obligatory foreign language taught in schools: Russian was replaced with English. In this case, English was simply a symbol of the path to Westernisation, since schools were now meant to equip youngsters with the competences of modern people who would function well in the European Union, to which Poland aspired. Schools propagated previously unfamiliar liberal ideas, which had never been popular in Poland (Szacki 1994). Disseminating them posed a threat to traditional institutions: the traditional patriarchal family and the Catholic Church. In response to this, a set of ideas emerged that, following Catherine Durandin (1994), we might call “autochthonous nationalism”, ostentatiously turning its back on the West and its values and customs, promoting things native and their superiority to foreign fashions endangering the national identity. The central figure here was the brave, noble and always suffering Pole-Catholic. This ideological conflict was fuelled by the filling in of missing pieces on the map of Polish antisemitism, accounts related to the role of rural areas and peasants in the third wave of the Holocaust,¹⁵⁸ the discussion on the preamble to the 1997 Constitution, and propaganda and counter-propaganda before the pre-accession referendum. In this battle, which unfolded at the end of the period under consideration, the latter trend evidently won,¹⁵⁹ with strong support from the Catholic Church and harmonising with the approaching wave of populism.

Schools have always enjoyed an important place in rural communities. A hundred years ago and for the majority of the century under analysis, the presence of a school raised a locality’s prestige and, over time, became a desirable element of the rural social infrastructure. Rural residents sought to have a school in their village: there are many accounts of such efforts in the inter-war period; later, in People’s Poland, there was a campaign to build schools through community actions in the 1960s (“A Thousand Schools for Poland’s Millennium”),¹⁶⁰ followed by silent resistance to the reform from the early

¹⁵⁸ Researchers distinguish three waves of the Holocaust. The first stage was decimation through hard labour and starvation in ghettos and labour camps; this lasted until spring 1942. The second stage was extermination in the General Governorate: mass annihilation in death camps; that was 1942. The third stage, from 1942 to the end of the war, was a time when searches for any surviving Jews in hiding were conducted.

¹⁵⁹ The first symptom of this victory was pre-accession government propaganda addressed to rural residents: instead of praising European values, it praised European money (Halamska 2009).

¹⁶⁰ In 1958 Władysław Gomułka announced a plan to build a thousand schools for the thousandth anniversary of Polish statehood. Rural residents worked for free on building these schools as part of community action work.

1970s and the establishment of *gmina*/commune schools, which caused elementary schools in some villages to be shut down or reduced their prestige, then protests against the closing of schools in the 1990s, and the founding of community or private schools. On the other hand, the idea of nationwide compulsory education met with some resistance in the course of history, as evidenced by absences in the higher primary school years during periods of intensified agricultural work, both in the inter-war period and in People's Poland. At such times, schools gained a rival in the form of the farms run by pupils' parents. There was a conflict between education through work, which had been shaped by tradition, and education by a specially appointed institution. This diminished with children's changing position in the family, which relieved them of farm work.

According to Jarosław Domalewski, in the century under analysis schools were a moderator of the transformations in Polish society and the Polish countryside. In every period, the state gave them specific roles and tasks:

In the two inter-war decades, they were defined by the peasant character of Polish society, spatially varied as a result of the historical partitioning divisions. In the People's Poland period, the tasks and roles of the education system were a distinctive outcome of the official ideology, the country's rapid modernisation and social divisions acceptable to the authorities, especially in the rural vs. urban aspect (Domalewski 2019, p. 413).

Between the 1989 breakthrough and the 2017 education reform, alongside the government, society also had a say in defining the tasks of the education system and the position of schools. Throughout the century in question, the school was an important institution influencing society, but it was not the only one. Its impact depended on the position and strength of other institutions of socialisation and the compatibility or divergence of the content they propagated. It had a dual influence on rural communities: direct and indirect. Directly, schools took some socialisation functions away from the family, the peer group and the neighbour group; indirectly, by equipping individuals with cultural competences, they changed their attitudes towards their environment and opened them up to the world, thus changing rural Poland.

3.5. Institutionalisation and deinstitutionalisation

Rural communities have always been saturated with various institutions; these have changed over time, with some disappearing and new ones emerging,

as part of the process of institutionalisation, a consequence of progressive diversification and modernisation. It is a process typical of an emerging and developing industrial society. Family and neighbourly relations changed, the number of direct contacts decreased and the functions fulfilled by rural communities waned, being taken over by specialised organisations and institutions. After the disintegration of the traditional social order, the reintegration of local communities occurred through formal institutions and associations. Krzysztof Gorlach and Zygmunt Seręga point out that this process had three aspects: structural, modernisation-based and related to social bonds. The structural aspect of institutionalisation stems from the relationship between "self-sufficient macrostructures" and "non-self-sufficient microstructures".¹⁶¹ Stimuli for changes, including institutional changes, pass down from the macrostructure to rural communities, which accept them, adapt them or reject them. This might concern the implementation of agencies of formalised mass organisations or new patterns of satisfying needs. The modernisation aspect of institutionalisation stems from "transforming the peasant community and the principles of its organisation to make them part of a modern, mass, industrial or post-industrial society" (Halamska 1991, p. 9). A major role in this process is played by formal institutions and organisations, which serve as a mediator between the local community and global society. "Modernisation is a process covering all areas of the social reality, and in that sense is universal", according to Kocik (1998 p. 28). The third aspect of institutionalisation is "essentially a process of disintegration of the traditional rural community. Its most important feature is the change in social bonds, progressing towards more formalised and depersonalised forms, covering an area extending beyond the community's traditional framework" (Gorlach, Seręga 1995, p. 204).

However, this is not the only process that rural communities undergo. According to Starosta (2003, p. 125 et seq.), globalisation results in:

an intensifying process of deinstitutionalisation, expressed mainly in the diminishing role of the nation-state, the family, organised labour structures and social service institutions. Deinstitutionalisation does not mean a rapid decline of the formal bureaucratised and hierarchic structures that were set up during industrialisation, forming the foundation of social life.

¹⁶¹ The authors invoke Rybicki (1979), who described the self-sufficiency of macrostructures through the ability to satisfy the full range of human needs and define the framework and direction of social life, also thanks to the continuance of formal organisations despite the replacement of their human substrate. "The non-self-sufficiency of microstructures means that they can only exist within the macrostructure; it serves as the 'channel' for the swift current of social life" (Gorlach, Seręga 1995, p. 195).

Rather, the process is characterised by the gradual curbing of their leading role in satisfying needs and exercising real control over behaviours.

This process was also noticeable in the case of rural institutions. Temporally, it was linked to the post-communist transformation, i.e. the period when Poland opened up to global processes. The shutdown of many institutions resulted directly from the changed rules by which the economy functioned after shifting from a centrally planned model to a free-market one. The disintegration of institutions serving agriculture was very noticeable. Another case in point are youth organisations, whose dynamic development¹⁶² had fallen on the inter-war period. Youth clubs (“circles”) first started appearing in 1919, and as a result of ideological and political differences two nationwide structures ultimately emerged: the Central Union of Rural Youth (CZMW) and the “Wici” Union of Rural Youth (ZMW “Wici”). These organisations’ goals included self-education, agricultural education, and cultural and sports activities. In a situation of agrarian overpopulation and problems experienced by rural schools, the new organisations responded to the needs of young rural residents, helping them to liberate themselves from the dictate of the family and its peasant farm and to negate the traditional roles in the rural community. In People’s Poland, even though youth organisations were subject to overwhelming state control, they were active to a certain, though decreasing extent. The reason was not only their growing statism (which actually guaranteed them funding), but also the changed status and position of young people: gradually extended and enforced compulsory education, access to post-primary education and the ever-widening channel of emigration from the countryside and from agriculture, as well as the invasion of mass culture, chiefly through television. Youth organisations practically ceased to exist in the Third Republic. Once quite numerous, the ZMW became a vestigial organisation with about 10,000 members. Young people’s social activity has almost died out; young rural residents extremely rarely get involved in the work of other civic organisations. The question why this is so remains open. Is it due to the appropriation of the social space by others to such an extent that “young people essentially do not have a space where they would feel good, at ease and safe, where they could do ‘their own thing’” (Strzemińska, Wiśnicka 2011, p. 60), or is it the result of their smaller number, the extended school education period, being active

¹⁶² In 1928 the CZMW had about 60,000 members and ZMW “Wici” had 22,000. In 1937 it was 130,000 and 97,000, respectively. This means that the membership of youth organisations almost tripled in the course of 10 years (Kamiński, Sitek 2019).

in the virtual space or failing to see possibilities for solving their problems (which are different than in the past) in an organisation?

Other institutions, such as those linked to labour, are also undergoing deinstitutionalisation. Alongside farmers, the category of self-employment has appeared in rural areas, i.e. people who create their own workplace through their own effort. Institutionalised forms of work, some disintegrating and new ones appearing, are related to the fact that dual occupations were widespread in rural areas in the second half of the 20th century. This caused the institution of clientelism to atrophy and *odrobek* (repayment through labour) and other forms of farmer cooperation to diminish, as well as limiting the status-building power of the family farm. Deinstitutionalisation affected the family and marriage as well. The statistics show that there is a substantial percentage of single-parent families, cohabiting couples and extramarital children in rural Poland. This process was initiated by the disintegration of the large, three-generation family and the autonomisation of the small, nuclear family. The autonomisation of its members also occurred as a result of progressive individualisation. At the same time, this indicates the declining role of the institution of the parish in controlling sexual and reproductive behaviours; another symptom may be the decreasing proportion of those involved in regular religious practices and the growing group of those virtually indifferent to religion.

Analysing these two processes, i.e. institutionalisation and deinstitutionalisation, over the past century, it is impossible not to notice that they overlap. With varying intensity, they coexist in time and space; they are immanent elements of social change, when the disintegration of a multifunctional institution is coupled with its replacement by others. This is a cycle in which institutionalisation is followed by deinstitutionalisation, after which new institutions, shaped by the requirements of the new order and its technological make-up, appear on the ruins of the old ones. In rural Poland these processes (institutions disappearing and new ones emerging) intensified after every political change: after the Polish state was reborn in 1918, after the communist revolution in the 1940s and during the post-communist transformation, all of which lent these universal changes a unique character.

4. "A degree of mental cohesion"

A local community is one type of social-spatial structure. The different types are determined by the character of the relationships between territorial aspects

and cohesion aspects, i.e. social bonds.¹⁶³ If, based on the findings of well-known researchers of rural areas, we assume that the village was a local community in the 1920s, then it was a “total local community, i.e. self-contained, covering almost all the functions of its members’ group life”, which led to “its unity and self-sufficiency” despite wealth differences (Czarnowski 1956, p. 173; Zawistowicz-Adamska 1966, p. 41), while “the cohesion and inner integration of the village were viewed as the qualities of a functional whole” (Wieruszewska 2019, pp. 254–255).

I have tried to explain these issues by analysing the changes in the material characteristics of rural communities but also those that have had an impact on the mental aspects of cohesion. Before moving on to an analysis of changes in social bonds, I would like to make two methodological reservations. Firstly, it should be remembered that early 20th-century studies describing local communities strove to highlight their important features, to describe their ideal type. A village was largely a total and self-contained community, but it was neither unified nor self-sufficient, nor did it constitute a consistently strongly integrated whole. In the early 20th century, villages were already diverse in terms of wealth, religion and ethnicity. Conflicting interests stemming from varied wealth were alleviated but not eliminated by clientelism ties. Existing antagonisms were an element of social bonding but were not a sign of social integration. This almost total whole also included “the other”: Jews, Ruthenians, sceptics and atheists. Furthermore, this was not a completely self-sufficient community, since it was infiltrated by global institutions like churches and the state, for example by the tax system and the increasingly widespread school system. Secondly, social bonding in itself is dual: a sense of closeness is coupled with a sense of dependence and obligation. According to Mirosława Marody and Anna Giza-Poleszczuk (2004, pp. 137–146), this is the effect of the complementary nature of these bonds, which leads to mutual dependence and limited individual freedom.¹⁶⁴ Attempts to rebuild communities in the age of globalisation with the aim of overcoming fears and mental tension do not seem to account for the above-mentioned element of obligation

¹⁶³ “In the human reality, social bonds appear on two planes. One comprises materially defined commonalities and bonds between people: commonalities and bonds of blood, background, territory, language, culture in various areas, and also the organisation of group life. The other plane is represented by certain states and acts of consciousness: a sense of connection to other people, or of mutual dependence, and the manifestation of this feeling in attitudes, behaviours and actions, whether individual or collective” (Rybicki 1979, p. 676).

¹⁶⁴ “... complementariness in this sense also means violating individual freedom (individuals’ autonomy in relation to the community) and equality, as there is no way of comparing individuals when they contribute in different ways to the community’s existence and independence” (*ibid.*, p. 140).

eliminating individuals' sense of autonomy. This problem has been discussed in analyses of the role of social capital, indicating that bonding capital does not have a favourable impact on a community's development.

Rural communities have changed. The type of cohesion between people living in the same territory has changed, and so have their bonds with the territory. The strongest influence in this was exerted by the opening up of communities, because it changed an alternative-free necessity into a choice (though sometimes rather limited). This applies not only to one's place of residence, but also to the possibility of choosing one's own groups and groups of reference outside the social space of the village, and of maintaining regular contacts with them. This sense of belonging has been influenced to some extent by territorial changes and changes in the character of the social space. Another factor of change has been growing social diversity. The emergence of occupational categories other than peasants/farmers demolished the previously monotonous rhythm of social communities' lives, dictated by the rhythm of the seasons and of day and night. Work was increasingly performed not just outside the homestead or the field but even outside the community. The principle of comprehensive mutual knowledge, i.e. everyone knowing about everything and everybody else, stopped working. Individuals started slipping out of the network of social control. Its decreasing influence also applied to family life, morals and customs. The emergence of non-agricultural social categories overturned the previous social stratification based on the farm, which resulted in its function in the family and the community becoming limited. These changes were coupled with changing principles of organising social life: its institutionalisation and deinstitutionalisation. At this point it is worth highlighting the influence of macrostructural factors forming the "channel" (see above) for the main current of change.¹⁶⁵

Social bonds have undergone fragmentation, also in rural communities. Starosta (2003, p. 121) understands this as "a process of growing autonomy and deepening distinctness of individuals and groups, and intensifying discontinuity and variability in biographies". He sees the breakthrough in this area as having taken place in capitalist society, in which:

the economic, legal and institutional systems evolve towards giving individuals agency. The establishment of private ownership of means of production, individuals as the acting subject in social relations and civil law as well as the public institutional system, satisfying needs outside the family

¹⁶⁵ Maria Wieruszewska (2019) points to the socio-political context of the changes.

and neighbourly domain, and also overcoming territorial limitations, was important for further transformations of social bonds. This liberated individuals from the necessity to submit to the dictate of collective structures (ibid.).

If we apply the initial definition of the fragmentation of bonds, then it also occurred in Poland during the development of an industrial society, i.e. in the second half of the 20th century. This was the period of “real socialism”, a far cry from the capitalist social order. The fragmentation of social bonds thus took place in different conditions but largely led to similar results. Perhaps, then, the rules of the transformation of these bonds should be sought in the transition from a pre-industrial to an industrial society, and not be associated with the emergence of the capitalist system? Or maybe the similar results are a consequence of Poland’s peripheral location and thus its dependent development?

However, the fragmentation of bonds does not mean that these ties have completely disappeared. They continue to exist in other forms and are renewed, also as a result of globalisation. The literature (cf. Starosta 2003) describes attempts to rebuild community on a symbolic foundation. In such a situation a sense of bonding is:

more likely a product of collective imagination, fear, sentiment or mental desire. ... Therefore, the more we are separated from our lasting social relations, the greater the emotional emphasis we place on rebuilding the symbolic community. The more we are territorially uprooted, the greater our respect for territorial identity and the greater the longing with which we look at the idyllic harmony of the traditional community (Starosta 2003, p. 136 et seq.).

4. THE RURALITY OF POLISH SOCIETY

Polish society, rural society?

There are several variations of the narrative on the nature of Polish society, the origins of its contemporary traits and the role of the countryside and its population in shaping them, as seen, for example, in descriptions of the national character. Edmund Lewandowski (2007) invokes the psychiatrist Antoni Kępiński, who distinguished two dominant types of personality: hysterical (gentry-type) and psychasthenic (peasant). The behaviours of the former are characterised by: the *zastaw się, a postaw się* principle,¹⁶⁶ the polonaise dance, Somosierra,¹⁶⁷ cavalry charges against tanks, the *liberum veto* and *Polnische Wirtschaft*. Typical traits of hysterical personalities include wishful thinking, taking dreams for reality, *pseudologia phantastica* (subconscious distortion of reality, delusion) and *belle indifférence* (a carefree attitude, making light of turbulence of one's own making). The psychasthenic is quiet, calm, hard-working, and stubborn and tough in hard times. This peasant nevertheless displays some rebellious tendencies, terrifying others with the image of Jakub Szela.¹⁶⁸ Similar thoughts are also offered by other authors. Adam Podgórecki (1995) has traced some qualities of Polish society to the above-mentioned classes, while Jacek Wasilewski (1986) titled his sketch *Polish Society, Peasant Society*. One thing is certain: the "rural classes" occupy a prominent place in the process of shaping contemporary Polish society, which is quite natural given the rural character of that society in the early 20th century.

Actually, Polish society has quite serious issues with its attitude to its own rurality, as reflected in problems with the once neutral word *wieśniak* (rural person/peasant). I once used *wieśniak* in a text in this originally neutral though slightly old-fashioned meaning, to denote a rural resident (just as we call an urban resident *mieszczuch*). I saw nothing wrong with the term, and mainly associated it with the nostalgic image of the countryside painted in Adam Mickiewicz's epic poem *Pan Tadeusz*. After all, that is where we read about a farmer "with healthy countenance" and "*wieśniaczki* [peasant women]

¹⁶⁶ Which roughly translated means "never mind whether you can afford it, always dazzle your guests" – translator's annotation.

¹⁶⁷ A reference to the Napoleonic-war battle in which Polish uhlans made a famous charge – translator's annotation.

¹⁶⁸ A leader of a 19th-century peasant uprising – translator's annotation.

turning their spinning wheels". The word elicited a vigorous response from readers that I did not understand. The invaluable Internet came to my rescue, throwing a swarm of synonyms at me, most of them derogatory. An analysis of this colloquial "linguistic image of the world" revealed the real, "secret, unmentioned discourse", as Roch Sulima (2020) put it.

1. Rural culture: peasant culture, folk culture, cultural patchwork?

By the culture of the countryside ...¹⁶⁹ we most often understand the entirety of the rural population's life, i.e. both the conditions and the material objects as well as the set of values and social norms and, finally, the sphere of spiritual ideas and the corresponding artistic products, where all of the aforementioned domains are assumed to be in a close relationship with one another, while the individual elements are supposed to be characterised by syncretism, i.e. the mutual permeation of different references and functions (Bukraba-Rylska 2019, p. 486).

This could serve as a universal definition of the culture of rural areas, indicating the main elements of the phenomenon, which comprises "everything people do, think and possess as members of society" (Bierstedt 1963, p. 123, cited by: Sztompka 2003, p. 233).

1.1. Peasant or folk?

However, this is not "rural culture", because the rural culture "actually dominant in Poland for almost a millennium ... was mainly the culture of the landed gentry, elevated above peasant culture, just like the 'lords' were elevated above 'churls'" (Mencwel 2017, p. 275). Andrzej Mencwel adds that the extensive relations between these two cultures have not been properly synthesised yet, even though both of their material correlates referred to the land: the peasant family farm in one case and the gentry's manor farm in the other.

¹⁶⁹ To lend this definition universality, I have left out the expression: "also known as peasant or folk culture", as I do not consider these to be synonymous notions. "At first folk culture was largely identified with peasant culture, and the two terms were used interchangeably. In the present day, it has been usual to treat folk culture as a historical formation variable over time, developed from elements drawn from three main types of source: original ethnic ones, those adopted from the culture of the upper classes, and those creatively adapted from interethnic influences" (Burszta 1999, p. 116).

Nor is the contemporary culture of the countryside a peasant culture. Peasant culture developed under feudalism, in which the distances between the estates were enormous. Also, their existence left a mark on both landowner and peasant culture; this class system was the *sine qua non* of the emergence of peasant culture. We should remember that in extensive areas of Polish territory feudalism did not end until the second half of the 19th century, and two opposite social classes continued as rural residents until the 1940s; their identity was defined by culture perhaps even more strongly than by economics. "The enlightened classes and the lower classes lived in separate worlds with their own measures, customs, obligations" (Czerwiński 1999, p. 113), a visible manifestation of this being language: "dialectal speech directly indicated membership in this 'lower' class and in the same kind of culture" (Burszta 1980, p. 488).

The literature of the subject contains many examples of the view that the culture of the countryside is "peasant culture" or "folk culture", and that these are equivalent terms which can be used interchangeably. There were two main reasons for this: there was a time when peasants, i.e. the "folk", were the predominant group in the countryside, and the core of the culture of rural areas, its axiological-normative system, came from this class. However, this is a major simplification, which is opposed by Wiesław Myśliwski:

Urban culture, and out-of-town culture, and suburban culture, and factory, sectoral, housing-estate, fishermen's, raftsmen's, manor-house and any other culture you can think of, can constitute folk culture. The notion of "folk" is indeterminate and as capacious as a bottomless well ... The term "folk culture" thus covers everything, depending on needs, wishes, visions, and even social and political expectations (Myśliwski 2004).

This differentiation is key in the present analysis because, taking traditional peasant culture as the starting point, I want to show how it transformed into popular culture in the course of 100 years, i.e. into the culture of the "folk class" in its modern-day meaning, which predominates not only in rural areas.¹⁷⁰

Peasant culture was the predominant culture in Polish rural areas at the beginning of the 20th century. Its norms and rules were also shared by other

¹⁷⁰ "Peasant memoirs, from Słomka, Nagryś, to contemporary memoirs written in the 1970s, clearly show the course of this process and the gradual shrinking of peasant culture's influence" (Szczepański 1986, p. 15). The picture of this evolution can be supplemented with the latest memoirs: *Sto lat mojego gospodarstwa. Pamiętniki mieszkańców wsi* [A Hundred Years of My Farm: Rural Residents' Memoirs], written in 2017 (cf. Michalska, Hałamska, Kłodziński 2018).

social groups in the countryside, including those that aspired to the peasant class (e.g. the rural, landless proletariat).¹⁷¹ Those who might break with its norms and rules were the few rural intellectuals of the time, who led “lordly” lives not involving physical labour on a farm, and also other “marginal” or “excluded” people who nevertheless had their place in this culture. What was this peasant culture whose end Myśliwski announced at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries?¹⁷² Polish academic literature includes many descriptions of it written by 20th-century social science luminaries. Wojciech J. Burszta points to an important quality of these analyses, including contemporary ones: he writes that ever since the times of Hugo Kołłątaj,¹⁷³ they have been awash with ethnographic imagination as well as being mythicised. The image of the peasant in Myśliwski’s essay cited above, and in many other studies as well, “is idealised insofar as the fact of the centuries-long isolation of this social class – vertical, horizontal and awareness-based – has major implications: the mental distinctness of the peasant population and a necessity to take into account its characteristic humanistic aspect” (Burszta 2011, p. 33). Then there is the substantial body of contemporary analysis tracing the influence of long years of serfdom, problems with social identity and the attitude to modernity and modernisation.¹⁷⁴ The present analysis aims to show the evolution of that distinctness and the decline of that “peasant humanistic aspect”, which took place over the course of a century.

1.2. The starting point, or peasant culture

Let us go back to the definition of culture. Its key element is the concept of a community, i.e. a group composed of different categories of the population (cf. Chapter 1), living in a specified territory (today: rural areas) throughout the period under analysis. Peasant communities were local communities made up of families living in a particular territory. The community considered that territory to be their own. As Kazimierz Dobrowolski (2005) underlines, these were groups which shared a strong bond that involved a sense of belonging and

¹⁷¹ Even some scientific studies treated the whole inter-war rural population as a “peasant population”, due to its cultural uniformity (cf. Żarnowski 1973). For a long time statistics also classified rural households that owned land as “peasant farms”, even though they made a living from work outside agriculture.

¹⁷² *Kres kultury chłopskiej* [The End of Peasant Culture] (Myśliwski 2004).

¹⁷³ 1750-1812, a constitutional reformer and educationalist – translator’s annotation.

¹⁷⁴ Examples one should mention include Andrzej Leder (2014), Jan Sowa (2011), Marcin Zaremba (2012).

the myth of group value. Their economic self-sufficiency was based on primitive farming. This would be Redfield's "part society". The features of such a community caused its cultural isolationism: spatial (geographic), social (clusters called villages, no social mobility, class homogeneity, no communication with high-brow culture) and awareness-based. Ludwik Stomma (1986) described the last of these "mythical": the views and the attitudes they helped shape stemmed from the assumption that: 1) things should be the way they are, 2) things are as they should be. Consequently, peasant knowledge was resistant to change in the perception of the world; there was a division into *orbis interior* and *orbis exterior*, which were in opposition to each other. "Social isolation on the outside was reflected on the inside in the special nature of the social organisation, which was characterised by unified social norms, values and life attitudes, cohesion and strength of public opinion, which guarded the invariability of the uniform social model to be followed by all" (Burszta 1980, p. 460).

These unique communities had a "part culture". Peasant culture was the culture of the peasant community, which had the features of a primary group as defined by Cooley and was a local culture. As regards the material aspect, or "what people possess", peasant culture was a culture of poor people, in which all artefacts were produced in the community itself (even if the model of a given artefact had originated elsewhere) or came from exchanges with other communities. Money fulfilled marginal functions in this culture. Dwellings, household equipment and clothing were made within the community from existing raw materials or those produced on the farm. The farm was also the source of food for the peasant family, whose diet was mainly plant-based.

This economic autarky was coupled with social autarky. "It was social isolation precisely, and the lack of opportunities for comparison, that led to the absolutisation of all the values and features of a group's own, rural life. Their own customs and traditions, tools and objects, work methods and techniques were considered constant, absolutely important and equally proper for everyone" (Burszta 1980, p. 460). Everything "people did" was characterised by traditionalism, which primarily stemmed from "faithful, mainly direct, intergenerational transmission of all the available resources of skills, knowledge and beliefs" (*ibid.*, p. 117). Dobrowolski (2005, p. 416 et seq.) points to the complex mechanism of cultural transmission, involving the selection of content being transmitted, which was guided by the principle of its practical usefulness. There were two forms of transmission: oral and practical. Oral messages were short and succinct (proverbs, rhymes), and transmission

occurred within institutionalised socialising, i.e. various forms of gathering in private homes and public places. Oral transmission served to shorten the historical perspective, i.e. “to limit knowledge about events to the orally transmitted tradition of facts mainly related to the peasant community’s direct surroundings” (Gorlach 1998, p. 88). Actions and behaviours (practical transmission) were customary, routine in character (“this is how our forebears, our fathers did things, and we do the same”). These communities insisted on respect for the fundamental social institutions and ideological content, which were guarded by sanctions, while actions and behaviours were characterised by a rationality that was backed by a specific worldview.

Józef Styk believes that the peasant vision of the world (“what people think”) was hierarchic and comprised three planes: the cosmological, the interpersonal and the intrapersonal:

In the mentality of the rural residents of old, the world was a single cohesive whole as a work of the powerful and wise God. Apart from the one-time act of creation, He controls the world as a whole as well as separate individual beings. He constantly performs creation acts in nature and in the human world (Styk 1993, p. 17).

Peasants felt a strong affinity with nature, which also included demons and the elements, over which humans had no power. Hence fatalism on the one hand, and references to magic and religion on the other. Ritualism, sensualism and folk religiousness are mutually complementary features:

Folk culture was dominated by thinking in images, with a tendency to represent various elements of faith and mythical ideas in the form of objects with local attributes, the sacralisation of the world and religious syncretism; religiousness manifested itself in family and annual rituals, while the agricultural calendar blended harmoniously with the calendar of church holidays (Burszta 1999, p. 117).

Folk religiousness intertwined with magic stemmed from natural phenomena being attributed hidden mystical powers, and from a human sense of uncertainty regarding the result of one’s own actions. The yearly agricultural cycle was synchronised with Christian rituals, many customs were given a religious dimension, and failure to follow them resulted in sin.¹⁷⁵ On the other

¹⁷⁵ Folk tradition “is based above all on the great rhythms of nature, on changes of the seasons, the sun and the moon, the holidays and celebrations connected with them, i.e. what they are called,

hand, as Włodzimierz Pawluczuk (2005) points out, folk religiousness also included practical and utilitarian content.¹⁷⁶

The values of peasant culture that went uncontested were the land and the farm, the family and:

...its work on the farm and in the household. Without this fundamental triad, there is no peasant class, no farmer occupation, and no rural area as a social and settlement system. One might say that these three values form the foundation of peasants' existence and their judgement of the internal and external world (Styk 1993, p. 14).

Land was the foundation of the whole sociocultural system; it was worshipped in an almost religious way, it had a mystical and symbolic aspect. Styk points out that "servicing the land" was the peasant's duty; the peasant thus took part in the action of the forces of nature. Labour had an intrinsic value: "Its qualities and conditions did not come under criticism. In the community's view, it contained elements of a moral stance. The value of labour was measured by the scale of physical effort" (ibid., p. 48). The third element of the triad was the family, which was – as described above – a multifunctional institution, including one that assigned the individual his or her place in the community. The basic division into "one's own" and "other", defining one's own group and the ways to treat "one's own" and "others", came from the family, from defining its closer and wider circles, including neighbourhood. This division was also the basis for a phenomenon that was defined much later: familism. Conservatism was the main principle of peasant life.¹⁷⁷ It was not an individual trait, but stemmed from the peasant's ties to the family, the group, from the inner cohesion of the village (Chałasiński 1938). Behaviours were determined by a peculiar peasant honour, whose norms – as Józef Burszta (1980) points out – often contradicted common sense.

on the full holidays, half-holidays and quarter-holidays and celebrations whose number is simply infinite ... besides general and common holidays and celebrations, there are holidays one might call family holidays" (Vincenz 2005, p. 426), to be celebrated in a larger or more close-knit group.

¹⁷⁶ This has survived to this day, e.g. offering Mass for the intention of preventing drought.

¹⁷⁷ It is worth remembering that Mendras (1967) situated his "end of the peasants" precisely at the time that innovation found its way to farms, destroying the previous functioning based on routine.

1.3. Conditions of continuance and factors of change

Peasant culture was an integral and multifunctional whole,¹⁷⁸ which was stable but at the same time in constant, very slow motion. It was a structure of long continuance in which changes occurred very gradually and imperceptibly. Its characteristic qualities developed over the long period of feudalism in rural Poland. A certain set of conditions was necessary not only for this culture to emerge, but also for it to continue, i.e. to preserve its basic, special features. According to Dobrowolski, they included:

farming jobs based on a low level of forces of production and the permanent settlement of village communities ... Primitive wooden tools ... and primitive techniques were coupled with a tendency for economic self-sufficiency and meagre exchange of goods as well as strong magical-mystical ways of thinking. Alongside these factors, there was also strong settlement attachment, often tied to little spatial mobility ... Inheriting the homestead and farm where the forefathers had worked in the same financial framework and the same natural environment facilitated the continuation of the old way of life. One extremely important factor that was conducive to maintaining the same products was the patriarchal system in the peasant family (Dobrowolski 2005, p. 415).

In the early 20th century, rural Poland was an agricultural and peasant society, and two-fifths of its residents were illiterate (cf. Chapters 1 and 2). The process of the decomposition of peasant culture was already visible because the isolation of rural areas had been broken, chiefly due to economic emigration at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. Another contributing factor was World War I, during which young peasants fought on many fronts. Various rural and agricultural organisations had already started emerging in the late 19th century (cf. Chapters 2 and 3), changing the internal organisation of rural communities. The literacy campaign, which had already begun in the 19th century, was of crucial importance as it opened up possibilities other than the oral transmission of cultural norms and models, including foreign ones. The uniqueness of peasant culture stemmed from the multifaceted isolation of the countryside. As local peasant communities opened up and were “incorporated into Poland”

¹⁷⁸ “The multifunctional character of human actions lent every activity the features of the fulfilment of a myth. Let’s take the harvest, for example. Both the time of harvesting work and the space where it took place were filled with special meanings assigned by tradition and ritual. In the traditional community, harvest time was a special sacred time. It was a sin to be idle during harvest time, and not take part in the village-wide act of gathering the crops” (Pawluczuk 2005, p. 411).

as a result both of programmed actions (e.g. the propagation of education and the elimination of illiteracy, the modernisation of agriculture and the opening of non-rural labour markets) and of spontaneous processes (the appearance of a great number of peasant-labourers), conditions for the decomposition of this cultural system developed. The decline of the unique circumstances necessary for this culture's existence has been outlined in the previous three chapters, in an analysis of the disintegration of the agrarian, pre-industrial society and the development of an industrial as well as post-industrial society. In such circumstances, the decomposition of the culture in question only seems natural:

That it had to die is a normal verdict of history. Nothing will be achieved by the moaning of various sentimentalists who invoke various, mostly false pieces of evidence of its existence, who take appearances for reality, including various organisational measures as well as financial sponsorship. To use war terminology: peasant culture lost the clash with advancing civilisation, even weak as it is in its Polish version. To a culture of poverty and isolation, civilisation proposed an improved standard of living and working as well as opening up to the world. These were temptations too great to resist.

It did not happen all at once. It was a lengthy and gradual process. It took at least several decades, maybe even longer. The first symptoms were noticeable long before World War I, on the rising wave of peasants' economic emigration. They continued in the emancipation aspirations – a paradox – of peasant generations before World War II. The dreamers of that period, like some dreamers even today, thought it was possible to reconcile civilisational progress in the countryside with the preservation of all the values of peasant culture. It proved to be impossible.

The varying level of drama involved in this culture's demise was also affected by historical events: World War I, then II, then the occupation, followed by People's Poland, the agricultural reform, and then the usually failed collectivisation that was nevertheless very costly for rural areas; the migration of many families to the so-called Recovered Territories and the simultaneous repatriation of peasant masses from across the River Bug; the mass emigration of rural youngsters to cities, factories, mines, schools, which spelled the indisputable advancement of those young people regardless of the fact that the political system and authorities imposed on Poland exploited this in their propaganda. We must also not forget that, at the same time, this was a draining of the most active, enterprising and gifted individuals from rural areas. Unfortunately, this resulted in the depreciation of rural areas as a space

of existence, as a place of people's self-fulfilment. In summary, all this caused a serious tectonic movement of unexpected force, upset the sense of continuance that peasants drew from their bond with the land, shook rural Poland to its foundations, including the model of its being and the imponderabilia of its culture. It opened wide the door to civilisational and cultural import (Myśliwski 2004).

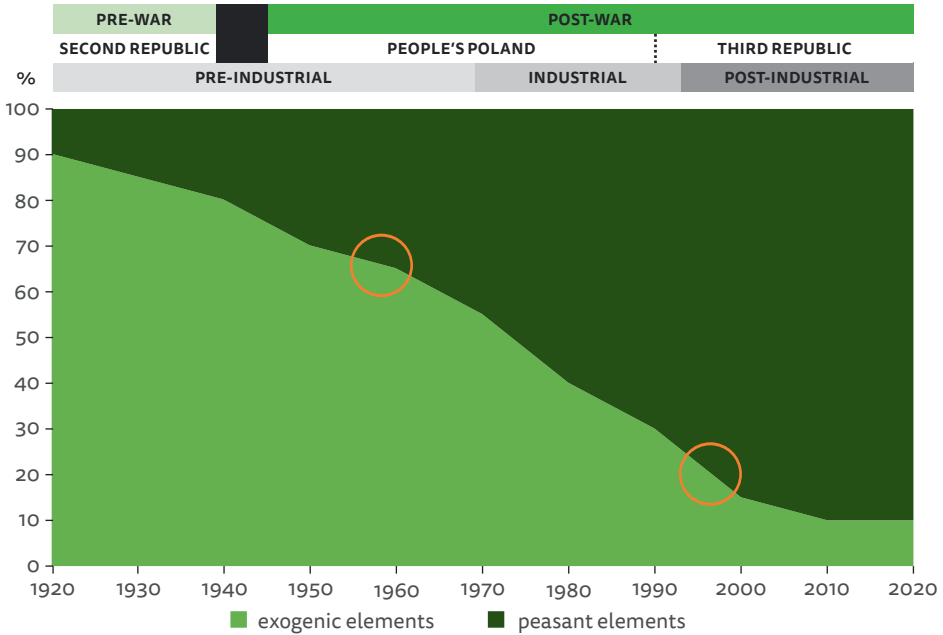


Figure 21.

The evolution of rural culture: from peasant culture to “folk” (popular) culture

Source: own work.

The vanishing of peasant culture described by Myśliwski can be simplified into a process progressing in varying rhythms over the past century (Fig. 21). It began in the pre-industrial phase, when rifts appeared in the wall of isolation in the late 19th century: economic migrations and growing literacy. Overcoming illiteracy was already a subject of the higher classes' concern in the 19th century, as evidenced in various activities aimed at the citizenisation of peasants and including them in the circulation of national culture.¹⁷⁹ This was also one

¹⁷⁹ As shown by the production and popularisation of “golden legends” describing peasants' participation in historical events. Cf. Ziejka 1984.

of the aims of the Second Republic's policies, while People's Poland, with its ambivalent attitude towards rural culture (peasant culture – no; folk culture – a definite yes), aimed for the cultural integration of the whole of society. The gradual opening-up of rural communities was conducive to the penetration of various foreign elements into peasant culture, which began transforming into folk culture:

At first folk culture was practically identified with peasant culture, and the terms were often used as synonyms. In the present day, it has become standard to treat folk culture as a historical entity variable over time, shaped from elements originating from three main types of source: originally ethnic, adopted from the culture of the higher classes, and adapted creatively from interethnic influences (Burszta 1999, p. 116).

Peasant culture was the basic structure (analogous to the “basic personality”) for the emerging rural culture. It underwent decomposition, and its outdated content and forms (elements, cultural traits, complexes, configurations – as Sztompka would have put it) were replaced with or even driven out by those that were “cultural imports”. One good example is the ousting of the cultural configuration of the horse and its replacement with the cultural configuration of the tractor and the car.¹⁸⁰ The table below (Table 8) presents this process on the example of selected elements. The disappearance of peasant elements of culture occurred as a result of breaks – never complete ones, however¹⁸¹ – in rural isolation, which has been highlighted in the right-hand column. This came about through programmed actions such as the cultural “incorporation of peasants into the nation”, of “rural areas into Poland”, and the literacy drive. This last campaign enabled the rural population to take advantage of sources other than just oral ones, giving rural residents access to high-brow culture: books and newspapers. Various technical devices serving

¹⁸⁰ “... in areas where the number of tractors increased, there appeared other elements symbolising the modern, urban lifestyle, and also typical urban culture. In areas where horses were still being used [alongside tractors], the traditional peasant farming system prevailed, together with its cultural features”, writes Izabella Bukraba-Rylska (2019, p. 507), basing her observations on analyses by Anna Pawełczyńska (1966).

¹⁸¹ Bukraba-Rylska describes the changes in rural culture as a bidirectional process, a “dual circulation: not only elements originating from many external contexts permeating into rural culture, but also the appearance of different content from rural culture in national, mass, popular or global culture, which was most often coupled with a fundamental change in their functions” (Bukraba-Rylska 2019, p. 495 et seq.). However, it should be remembered that: 1) the centres disseminating that content did not have the same kind of power of influence, and 2) the “circulation of cultural content” was very variable over time.

Table 8. Rural culture: the transition from peasant culture to popular culture, i.e. the disappearance of “peasant” elements and growth of “non-peasant” ones 1918–2018 (examples)

Years	“Folding” of peasant culture	Increase of exogenic elements
1920	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – disappearance of traditional, wooden farming implements – disappearance of oxen as draught animals and of traditional cultivation techniques 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – women’s suffrage – rural literacy drive – economic migrations
1930	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – disappearance of regional folk costumes, rapid disappearance of folk art – changes in traditional forms of help, cooperation, clientelism – simplification of rituals: stripping many of them of magical significance – emergence of ambivalence towards tradition (tradition vs. progress) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – appearance of farming machinery (threshers), urban furniture, clothing and footwear – emergence of various associations – spreading popularity of bicycles and the fashion for wedding portraits – regionalisation, “rusticalisation” of national culture and the birth of “popular industry”: the “Zakopane fixation”^{a1} – appearance of physicians and other public functionaries – entrance of the “printed word” – growing presence of the “rural intellectual”
1940	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – the trauma of the Great War: the terror of the occupation; the Holocaust: normative chaos^{1b} 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – extermination of the “other” – emergence of mistrust of “one’s own”
1950	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – disappearance of the landowner class – agricultural reform and changed attitudes towards the land, “desacralisation of the land”^c – deconstruction of rural cohesion: “class struggle”, kulaks vs. <i>byednyaks</i> – forced collectivisation – weakening of neighbourly bonds and of the position of local authority figures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – aggression towards “one’s own”: banditry^d – redefinition of peasant resourcefulness: looting^e – abandonment of one’s own community: migrations to the Recovered Territories – elimination of illiteracy: compulsory education and courses for the illiterate – electrification – growing popularity of the radio – tractors – new state, quasi-cooperative and youth institutions – new “authority figure”: the omnipotent communist party

Table 8
continuation

Years	"Folding" of peasant culture	Increase of exogenic elements
1960	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - deconstruction of the patriarchal family I: its gradual liberation from under the local community's control, children's autonomisation, and changes in the definitions of feminine and masculine roles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - permanent and commuter migrations: peasant-labourers - commodification of family farms
1970	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - blow to peasant routine and conservatism: innovations in agriculture 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - monetarisation of the rural economy
1980	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - changes in intra-rural clientelist relations: individual mechanisation of agriculture - change in the attitude towards land: "pension for land" - disappearance of traditional everyday and Sunday-best clothes, traditional forms of residential buildings and their interior decoration - changes in the attitude to time and the rural daily rhythm - changes in "work morals": work arduousness and the lack of free time^f - disappearance of peasant "bread morals" I:^g feeding livestock with shop-bought bread 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - institutionalisation of social life: health care, welfare, cultural transmission institutions: libraries, cinemas, café clubs - mass supply of the WFM motorcycle - television becoming widespread: attack of mass culture - emergence of models of "modern nutrition", widespread consumption of manufactured goods - new wedding rituals, other new rituals, e.g. "communions", and fashions
1990	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - trauma of great change: normative chaos II: antinomies of the social subconscious 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - new values and rules of operation - unemployment in rural areas
2000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - disintegration of the post-traditional system of agriculture's environment - sense of social superfluousness: "not every hectare has to yield a harvest", "not every product can be sold" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - widespread ownership of cars - young rural residents enrolling in university-level schools on a mass scale
2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - deconstruction of the patriarchal family II: women's autonomisation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - widespread use of mobile phones and electronic communication - EU accession: dissemination of a new model for the functioning of agriculture
2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - disappearance of peasant "bread morals" II: cereal crops used as fuel^h 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - new function of land: direct payments - domination of economic rationality in farming

^a More on this: Bukraba-Rylska 2019, p. 499 et seq.

^b "At first, though rarely, there were people who remembered the cries of 'Hit the Jew' and were pleased about the Jewish tragedy. However, even they soon fell silent, overwhelmed by the monstrosity of Nazi deeds, especially when the third stage of the operation against Jews ensued" (Stryczek 1984, cited by: Obirek 2019, p. 562). This took place in a situation of widespread antisemitism, which assumed the form of "collective psychosis" (Zaremba 2012).

^c "Land was a ruthless, tough obligation, dictating the rhythm of daily life, year after year – the rhythm of the seasons, during which the land made its demands ... Land ensured life, and the price of life was labour. People's attitude towards the land was very complex. After all, arable land is the work of humans" (Szczepański 1993, p. 22 et seq.).

^d Cf. Zaremba 2012, the chapter "Chłopska wojna" ("Peasant war", pp. 328–334).

^e "Looting was a kind of folk response to the crisis, to what was sometimes a permanent state of shortage and poverty. Other elements typical of peasant culture can also be found in the origins of looting: pragmatism and utilitarianism. 'We don't know what life will bring, so it's better to provide for ourselves'; 'it might come in handy'; 'nothing should go to waste', are the statements most likely made by looters, for whom, let us underline, looting was not simple theft. To ease their conscience, in such situations they would say: 'found, not stolen'. However, this does not mean that by breaking the rule of universal protection of ownership, they fully rejected the rule 'thou shalt not steal'. Dariusz Stola points out that they probably applied it in a form limited to 'their own kind', which explains why it was easier to loot landowner, Jewish, German or state-owned property than that of a neighbour from the village" (Zaremba 2012, p. 277).

^f "people lived to work, i.e. to carry out the work intended for them. Work was the most important thing in life. Above all, it was a necessity of life ... Work also meant confirmation of the moral value of the *gazda* [a landholder in the Podhale region] and his family. A hard-working person was a good person, since work was also a religious covenant with the Lord. A hard-working person had no time for sins, whatever those might be" (Szczepański 1993, p. 31).

^g "Bread was not allowed to be destroyed, or wasted, or kicked around. It was kept in a chamber, cool and humid, sliced in the amount to be eaten, the rest being eaten at the next meal; feeding bread to livestock, poultry or cattle was simply a sin, severely punished by the ruthless Lutheran God" (ibid., p. 40).

^h "They lost their 'soul', i.e. many elements of their former social role, many cultural, mystical and magical attributes, becoming simply an industrial raw material. That is why grain could be spilled onto railway tracks by peasants in an organised and deliberate way at the very end of the 20th century, while stray cattle could run wild in former state-farm fields near the German border" (Kocik 2000, p. 139).

Source: own work based on literature cited.

communication gradually appeared as well, from means of transport (bicycles, motorcycles, cars) together with the appropriate infrastructure, to others that facilitated communication with the world (radio, television, mobile phones, the Internet). Radio and television played an enormous role, contributing to the influx of mass culture into rural areas,¹⁸² disseminating new models of life, influencing changes in the system of values, shaping everyday behaviours, tastes and language:

The inclusion of rural areas in the circulation of the mass culture of radio, television and colour magazines, the sudden intensification of contacts with towns and cities through education and the work of peasant-labourers, seeking paths to social advancement solely in non-agricultural sectors, the great social processes of Poland's industrialisation and urbanisation, mainly involving the permeation and popularisation of the urban lifestyle or its imitations and substitutes, the formation of new cultural institutions in rural areas, such as cultural community centres, discos etc., caused the rapid erosion of folk culture (Szczepański 1986, p. 13).

These processes were consolidated by the commercialisation of the media in the 1990s and the progressive digitisation of rural Poland. An amalgamation of the left-hand column in Table 8 and Fig. 21 reveals a varying rhythm of the decomposition of peasant culture: it accelerated noticeably in the industrial phase, when changes started to cumulate. The material elements of the culture started disappearing quite easily and quickly (many contemporary rural residents do not even know what they were called), while customs took longer to fade. Key factors in the degeneration of peasant culture included the changing positions in the system of fundamental peasant values: family, land and labour. The disintegration of the patriarchal family (cf. Chapter 3.2) was gradual, and started from its liberation from under the local community's control. Then came the autonomisation of its members: children and (currently ongoing) women. Land slowly lost its importance, not only as it stopped being the "nourisher" but also as it lost its value as the sacrosanct "patrimony". To some people who own land today it has the value of a means of production, sometimes also a means of cultivating family traditions.¹⁸³

¹⁸² An excellent analysis of the deconstruction of folk culture (in this case, working-class culture) was presented by Richard Hoggart (1997). As regards the influence of mass media in Poland, we have to underline the occurrence of its two waves: the first when these media found their way to the masses (1960s to 1980s), and the second, which came after 1990, when uncensored and private media appeared.

¹⁸³ Cf. on the topic: *Sto lat mojego gospodarstwa. Pamiętniki mieszkańców wsi* (Michalska, Halamska, Kłodziński 2018).

To others, it continues to be an obligation, part of the duty to help elderly parents with its cultivation because “the land must produce”; however, this is an obligation towards the parents rather than towards the land. Finally, there is a numerous group for whom land ownership has become a source of extra income in the form of direct payments (and the basis for claiming them). Labour and the attitude towards it have changed completely, not only as a result of technical changes. Many different forms of work have appeared, not just farming work and not just physical labour. White-collar work has become legitimised among rural residents; it gives people the right to be tired and therefore the right to rest. Work is mainly performed to earn an income; obtaining this has become people’s obligation to themselves and their family. To perform work, it is necessary to have the appropriate (occupational) training, acquired outside the family. People are entitled to rest after work, i.e. to have free time. Such changes in the constitutive elements of peasant culture had a rather easily noticeable material aspect. However, they also caused awareness changes: in the vision of the world and the rural community, in the perception of oneself, in mentality. Economic migrations were forced by poverty, but the migrants must also have felt their “own power”, since they were able to face the unknown *orbis exterior*. The emergence of an ambivalent attitude towards tradition in the Second Republic period, as described in *Młode pokolenie chłopów* [The Young Generation of Peasants] (Chałasiński 1938), was also enormously important. Young people, supported by the ideology of agrarianism, noticed the power of tradition (and conservatism) that was blocking changes. A new stage in the relationship between tradition (defined as “backwardness”) and “progress” was brought by People’s Poland; young rural residents were susceptible to the visions being painted at the time, as documented in the volumes of *Młode pokolenie wsi Polski Ludowej* [The Young Rural Generation of People’s Poland].¹⁸⁴ This meant the emergence of two groups in rural communities: young people pushing for change, and mature and older people “moderating the changes”, as Krystyna Szafranec (2002) put it. It also

¹⁸⁴ The series *Młode pokolenie wsi Polski Ludowej*, vol. 1–9. Warszawa: Ludowa Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza. The series covers the period between 1964 and 1980: vol. 1. *Awans pokolenia* [Advancement of a generation], 1964, 728 p.; vol. 2. *Tu jest mój dom: pamiętniki z Ziemi Zachodnich i Północnych* [This is my home: Memoirs from the Western and Northern Territories], 1965, 702 p.; vol. 3. *W poszukiwaniu drogi: pamiętniki działaczy* [Searching for a path: Memoirs of activists], 1966, 791 p.; vol. 4. *Od chłopa do rolnika* [From peasant to farmer], 1967, 701 p.; vol. 5. *Gospodarstwo i rodzina* [Farm and family], 1968, 726 p.; vol. 6. *Nauczyciele i uczniowie: pamiętniki* [Teachers and pupils: Memoirs], 1969, 730 p.; vol. 7. *Nowe zawody: pamiętniki* [New occupations: Memoirs], 1969, 617 p.; vol. 8. *Drogi awansu w mieście* [Urban paths to advancement], 1972, 669 p.; vol. 9. *Odzyskanie młodości: pamiętniki* [Regained youth: Memoirs], 1980, 517 p.

involved questioning the position of old people: rural culture began to change from post-figurative to pre-figurative. These changes in awareness were very strongly influenced by periods of cultural trauma, which came with intensified fear. World Wars I and II, the occupation of Polish lands and the terror that came with it, the Holocaust as well as the “proletarian revolution” (the trauma of the “Great Fear” – Zaremba (2012)) and its consequences, caused normative chaos. The image of the world changed, and so did the reigning – no longer so divine – order. A new mistrust appeared: of one’s own kind. This meant that not only the other but also one’s own could be a threat. The next trauma (of the great change – Sztompka (2000)), the revolution of 1989 and the consequent normative chaos¹⁸⁵ accompanying the post-communist transformation, resulted not so much in “the end of the peasant farm” as also in a sense of social superfluosity,¹⁸⁶ when it was not just farmers who turned out to be helpless in the face of the ruthless mechanisms of wild capitalism. Sztompka attributes the intensification of indifference, cynicism and manipulation in culture to these traumas.

1.4. The homogenisation of folk culture and rural Poland’s cultural patchwork

As assumed above, folk culture is not peasant culture, though it can contain many of its elements. As a reminder: “In the present day, it has been usual to treat folk culture as a historical formation variable over time, developed from elements drawn from three main types of source: original ethnic ones, those adopted from the culture of the upper classes, and those creatively adapted from interethnic influences” (Burszta 1999, p. 116). The vanishing of peasant elements was coupled with the expansion of rural culture by elements imported directly or adapted from other cultures, mainly from urban culture; rural culture underwent urbanisation (Pawełczyńska, Tomaszewska 1972). The symbolic moment when peasant culture disappeared might be the time when it stopped being the dominant culture, i.e. when it lost its “organising

¹⁸⁵ Sztompka (2003, p. 279) catalogued the cultural dissonance after 1989, listing the following oppositions: collectivism – individualism, egalitarianism – meritocracy, mediocrity – success, security and safety – risk, fate – agency, welfare protectiveness – self-reliance, blaming the system – responsibility for oneself, passive privacy – public participation, immersion in the past – orientation towards the future, one side of which formed the culture of real socialism while the other belonged to the democratic and market-based culture.

¹⁸⁶ One of the first symptoms was the Tadeusz Mazowiecki government’s decision to import grain when farmers halted its sale, counting on higher prices. In desperation, farmers started attacking grain transports and spilling the grain over railway tracks.

power"¹⁸⁷ in relation to inflowing elements, when it "stopped governing them". New content and form in rural culture, coming from highbrow, national, urban, bourgeois or even working-class culture, created contemporary rural culture. The question remains open whether it is coherent, whether it has any "guiding principle" to govern it, or – as Bystroń (1936) once suggested – it is composed of variable sets of content "produced in a given group or outside it, and able to be a part also of other sets belonging to other social groups at the same or a different time" (Bukraba-Rylska 2019, p. 494). This means that a unique cultural patchwork might exist in a given area, e.g. a rural area inhabited by different groups.¹⁸⁸ Considering the present-day diversity of the rural population, one could assume that this is in fact the case. Evidence of this can be found in the wide range of lifestyles observed in the countryside (Podedworna 2010). There are obvious differences between the lifestyles of the rural upper class and middle class and the popular class (farmers and working-class people), and also in their attitudes, self-assessment, opinions, level of authoritarianism and life goals. The life motto of the popular class usually comes down to achieving affluence and lack of stress, whereas in the middle and upper class it is mainly a sense of the necessity to achieve life goals, even at substantial personal cost (Halamska 2018). At the same time, there is a set of basic values common to Polish and therefore also rural society. In some part, this community is the product of "dual circulation" (Bukraba-Rylska 2019) in a broad sense, of an amalgamation of rural and non-rural cultural content. Together with millions of rural residents, rural content and forms of culture flowed into towns and cities in a broad stream, serving to create popular culture.¹⁸⁹ Some elements penetrated into elite culture,¹⁹⁰ having been preserved by rural children during their advancement. It was a phenomenon called the ruralisation

¹⁸⁷ As Stanisław Burkot writes when analysing the prose of Tadeusz Nowak: "peasant culture as a system of values is alive to this day in the sense that it still forms a force holding the community together" (cited by: Burszta 1986, p. 27).

¹⁸⁸ "The value of Bystroń's definition also lies in the fact that it enables us to notice a multitude of heterogeneous elements in a given culture (models, ideas and values, human actions and products of those actions – tangible and intangible), which nevertheless are not bound to one another, nor to the group in whose possession they are at a given time, by any specific relationship or permanent relationship, but circulate between different systems" (Bukraba-Rylska 2019, p. 494).

¹⁸⁹ Another, though smaller stream of migrants flowed from cities to the countryside. Cf. Chapter 1.

¹⁹⁰ They were contributed by the writers of the "peasant trend"; this contributed rurality was varied. Józef Burszta (1986) distinguished three generations of peasant-trend writers: the first, i.e. writers born during the partitions, displayed ambivalence because they wanted folk culture to match up to national culture, but also to remain distinct from it; the second, i.e. writers debuting after World War II, underlined psychological and cultural distinctness, striving to lend it national and universal significance; the third comprises writers debuting after 1970, who – like Edward Redliński – present folk culture as split or stretched between "traditionalism" and "avant-gardism".

of culture, which was: “[a] process of the universalisation of values typical of the countryside ... Ruralisation becomes woven into city-building processes, so one might say, ignoring the purely verbal contradiction, that it is the other facet of urbanisation” (Czerwiński 1975, p. 205 et seq.). The urbanisation of rural culture and the ruralisation of urban culture were processes that homogenised culture – mainly popular culture, i.e. the culture of the rural and urban popular classes.

One could delve deeper and ask how urban and rural popular culture and “upper class”, i.e. middle-class and elite culture, differ. All of them are part of national culture, which, as not only Marcin Czerwiński has set out to prove, has rural roots. These rural origins are perceptible in great works of Polish literature, and not just in its brilliant peasant trend. Many traces have been preserved in language: in proverbs, aphorisms and sayings.

We speak of an ox forgetting what it was like to be a calf, the egg trying to be smarter than the hen, the apple not falling far from the tree, fighting like cats and dogs, the feelings of peas growing by the roadside, buying a cat in a bag and selling the skin of a live bear, the impropriety of looking a gift horse in the mouth, a frog offering its legs to be shoed, a fish in water as a sign of happy adaptation etc. etc. (ibid., p. 156).

Even though almost 50 years have passed since Czerwiński listed these Polish proverbs, they are still in use, although sometimes one might wonder whether legitimately.

Analysing changes in rural culture, I would like to draw attention to one important circumstance in the way it was shaped and transformed: the presence of the dominant landowner/lordly culture, which continued to serve as a point of reference. This was invoked by the authors cited in the introductory remarks to this chapter. The essence of the relationship between the two cultures was outlined by Józef Chałasiński (1938, 1946), but it was mainly “lordliness” that soaked into culture, including popular culture.

A characteristic feature of Polish inter-war society was the way the courtesy title *pan* (gentleman) was applied. Originally *pan* meant a noble master of an estate. Gradually the term was increasingly applied to the intelligentsia and burghers, but was not widespread among the popular masses ... Here it was also important who was simply a *pan*, or *pan doctor*, *pan professor*, or *pan hrabia* (count)”, as Roszkowski writes, noting a similar trend in Hungary: “Since the stratification of land ownership remained almost unchanged, there was

little challenge to the feudal relations. This was clearly manifested in the use of aristocratic and noble titles, such as 'Excellency', 'Dignity', 'Greatness' and 'Authority' ... (Roszkowski 1995, pp. 188-191).

The presence of this lordliness in the culture of the above-mentioned two nations had real consequences: the Frenchman Bernard Michel (1997) indicates the same features as reasons for the poor development of the middle class in these societies.

2. Rural "politicking"

In the early 1990s, two of my rural sociologist colleagues published the study *Chłopi we współczesnej Polsce: przedmiot czy podmiot procesów społecznych* [Peasants in Contemporary Poland: Object or Acting Subject of Social Processes] (Gorlach, Seręga 1991). It was one of many analyses from the 1980s onwards that described and tried to explain the social roots of the Solidarity movement and its consequences. Distinguishing three aspects of subjectivity – internal, related to the states of awareness of the acting individual; external, involving an analysis of reality and its construction; and the aspect of individuals' and collectives' activity – the authors concentrated their analysis on the first, awareness level. They were interested in the subjectivity of the peasantry (a "great social category") as the social category "that traditionally had the strongest impact on its [rural Poland's] social nature" (ibid., p. 29). My purpose is different: by analysing a few elements over a century, I want to show the influence of rural areas (where the proportion of peasants has been diminishing) on the political nature of Poland.

Modern times (Hobsbawm 1959/1966), and especially the 20th century (Wolf 1969/1974), provide many examples of peasant revolts or peasant support for revolutions started by others. Commenting on the examples of peasant wars described by Eric Wolf (Mexico, Russia, China, Cuba, Algeria, Vietnam) and adding Cambodia to the list, Henri Mendras points out that in every case:

nothing would have happened without the participation of peasant masses, nor would anything have been achieved without the participation of others... However, peasant revolutions most often accelerate urbanisation and industrialisation, and serve to enable the seizure of power by the bourgeoisie and public functionaries, city people and managers of the economy, which does not tolerate any break with the logic of its functioning (Mendras 1976, p. 122).

The focus of the present analysis is political participation, understood as various forms of behaviour and activity aimed at legitimising or delegitimising the political system, and how it changed over the 100 years under consideration. Daniel Mider (2010, p. 35) distinguished four types: support (active legitimisation, intensive activity), indifference (no activity, or sporadic activity), alienation (no activity) and opposition (active delegitimation, intensive activity).¹⁹¹ These conscious, intentional and rational actions can also be treated as an expression of rural areas' political agency (Karwat 1980). My inspiration here is the work of Barrington Moore (1966/1983), who analysed the modern history of England, France, the United States, China, Japan and India in order to trace the influence of the "rural classes" on the emergence of either liberal democracy or totalitarianisms (fascism, communism). It is also worth considering this idea here, in reflections on a century of changes in rural Poland, perhaps slightly tarnishing the image of the peasant who "... is mighty, and that's that".

2.1. Peasant movements, or contestatory subjectivity

In a sketch written in the late 1980s, following several editions of the *Polacy* (Poles) survey,¹⁹² Władysław Adamski (1988) distinguished two variants of social (collective) subjectivity: contestatory subjectivity and participatory subjectivity. These corresponded to different forms of political action. For contestatory subjectivity, it is opposition, originating from the Mertonian rebellion. Social protest movements in a broad sense definitely belong to the former group of actions. In an in-depth analysis of peasant movements¹⁹³ in the 20th century, Grzegorz Foryś (2019, p. 600) assumes after Sidney Tarrow (1998) that a social movement is "a collective challenge based on common purposes and the social solidarity of its participants as well as their collective identity, which have the character of sustained collective action". These peasant-farmer collective actions assumed various forms in the century under analysis. Local protest actions were already taking place in 1918, when the Polish state was re-emerging. The formation of the Tarnobrzeg Republic was a spectacular event:

¹⁹¹ He based this on the typology suggested by Robert K. Merton (2002), who used the relationship between culturally defined goals and socially acceptable means of achieving them as the basis for distinguishing conformity, ritualism, retreatism and rebellion.

¹⁹² They were entitled *Polacy '80*, launched in 1980 and continued in 1981, 1984 and 1989.

¹⁹³ In this, he clearly distinguishes between "peasant movements" and "folk/popular movements", and states that "the focus of attention will mainly be the contestation activity of the peasantry and farmers" (Foryś 2019, p. 600).

Adverse circumstances as well as hunger and poverty encouraged peasants, farm labourers and craftsmen to rebel against the landed class. A crowd of many thousands gathered in the Tarnobrzeg main square on 6 November 1918, demanding social justice and reforms that would get them out of their tough economic situation. The demonstrators' leaders were: Tadeusz Dąbal, a social activist and Jagiellonian University law student, and Rev. Eugeniusz Okoń. The protests quickly spread across Tarnobrzeg county as well as Mielec, Kolbuszowa and Nisko counties. The peasant government of *Gmina/Commune Committees* was introduced there, and a citizens' militia was formed. This republic was overseen by the Revolutionary Committee and the Radical Peasant Party established by Eugeniusz Okoń (Foryś 2019, p. 602).

This radical movement demanded agricultural reform without compensation as well as the transfer of land to "hired peasants" free of charge, the confiscation of Church land and the nationalisation of forests. The demands were put forward by poorer peasants and farm labourers. At the same time, this was an attempt to create a centre of power (based on the Soviet model) in the Galicia region to compete with the Polish Liquidation Committee (PKL).¹⁹⁴ The peasant republic ceased to exist in January 1919, after the PKL intervened.

The deteriorating economic situation caused the peasant mood to radicalise and protest actions to intensify. This already happened in the late 1920s, with the outbreak of the Great Depression, which lasted until the mid-1930s in rural Poland. In the poorest regions, i.e. central Poland and Małopolska, boycotts were undertaken by some peasants as well as farm labourers:

The main demands appearing together with the boycotts were economic in character, and alongside the state their addressees also included the local authorities. The main demands during this period included writing off debts in rural areas, concessions in debt repayment, higher prices for agricultural produce, but also reduced fees for marketplace entry and parking. The boycotts were organised locally and involved blocking trade at farmer's markets (*ibid.*, p. 604).

Many such actions were undertaken by peasants in southern Małopolska in the early 1930s. It is worth noting the example of the "Lesko uprising" in 1932,

¹⁹⁴ The Polish Liquidation Committee (PKL) was formed in October 1918 and comprised representatives of all the political parties active in the National Sejm (parliament); Wincenty Witos was the chairman. It ended its activity in March 1919. Its purpose was to administrate the Galicia region during the disintegration of Austria-Hungary.

which shows the state of social moods and fears: peasants protested against compulsory free work on road construction, in fear of a return to serfdom. Around 5,000 peasants took part in the protests, to which the authorities responded by arresting participants, filing court cases, pacifying rebellious villages by force and introducing various barriers to peasant political activity. Several hundred peasants were arrested as a result of the "Lesko uprising", and seven were killed.

The biggest challenge came with the Great Peasant Strike, which took place in many regions of Poland between 16 and 27 August 1937. A few million peasants took part, putting forward not just economic but also political demands:

The actions undertaken by the striking peasants included blocking roads, suspending food deliveries to cities and halting purchases for 10 days. Following pacification measures by the state, 44 peasants were killed, 5,000 were arrested and 617 received court sentences (Wierzbieńec 2008). The Great Peasant Strike was the largest political manifestation of the inter-war period (Foryś 2019, p. 606).

According to Foryś, peasant protest activity in Poland was moderate in the inter-war period. Peasant protests were held mainly for economic reasons, but were also accompanied by social and political demands. These grew in prominence due to support for the protests shown by leading representatives of peasant parties.¹⁹⁵ The movements in question were largely local and regional, the most active region being Galicia with its agricultural issues: the fragmentation of peasant farms, agrarian overpopulation, unemployment and poverty. The repertoire of peasant protests was quite extensive: rallies, demonstrations, marches, strikes and boycotts.

There were also plenty of reasons to protest in People's Poland, especially in the years 1948–1956, since the fundamental problems of rural areas – hunger and agrarian overpopulation – had not been resolved. The main reason behind peasant contestation, especially in the above period, was collectivisation, which was enforced using various methods: economic and direct coercion. The peasants responded by rebelling. Foryś notes that 168 protests broke out in 1953. Passive resistance was a widespread response, and involved ignoring, within safe limits, the authorities' orders to form cooperatives as well as

¹⁹⁵ The most eminent representatives of rural areas during this time were: Wincenty Witos, Maciej Rataj, Bolesław Wystouch, Jakub Bojko, Władysław Kiernik, Józef Putek, Kazimierz Bagiński, Adolf Sawicki, Stanisław Mikołajczyk (Foryś 2019).

deliberately reducing agricultural production and concealing its real volume. Later on, when cooperation with the system became possible (and necessary), informal pressure and all kinds of corruption became methods of influencing the authorities – according to Jerzy Wilkin (1988) as measures intended to “tame socialism”.¹⁹⁶ In the 1970s, when the threat of collectivisation had disappeared, compulsory deliveries were abolished and elements of welfare care were introduced (see Chapter 1), the forms of resistance to which farmers (no longer peasants) resorted also changed. Harbingers of organised political activity emerged at the end of the decade: the Peasant Self-Defence Committee near Lublin, later a similar one near Rzeszów, the Provisional Committee of the Farmers’ Trade Union near Grójec, and a few others.¹⁹⁷ This modest legacy was invoked by the farmers’ trade unions formed after the August Accords:¹⁹⁸ Peasant Solidarity, Rural Solidarity and the Self-Governing Union of Agricultural Producers, each linked to a different community. “Neither the Polish authorities nor the Soviet party leadership wanted the legalisation of a rural Solidarity. In consequence, some of the activity of farmers’ unions in 1980 and 1981 was concentrated on fighting for the right to legalisation and court registration” (Kozłowski, Olszek 2019, p. 630). The main demands of this Solidarity-based farmer movement can be divided into three trends, according to Wierzbicki and Rambaud (1982): 1) “bourgeois”, due to its drive for recognition of private ownership of land and the permanence of individual (private) farming; 2) “socialist”, which demanded equal living conditions in urban and rural areas; 3) “universalistic”, which grouped demands related to civil rights, primarily freedom of religious practice. Sit-ins in public buildings were most often used as a form of pressure. The biggest and longest such sit-in was staged in the buildings of the Town and Commune Office in Ustrzyki and the Provincial Trade Union Council in Rzeszów, lasting from the beginning of January to 20 February 1981. Following negotiations with the authorities, the Rzeszów-Ustrzyki Accords were signed;¹⁹⁹ however, they did not guarantee

¹⁹⁶ I think the idea presented by Górlach (2001), that this was a kind of “hidden discourse” consisting in the multiplication of informal pressures, is debatable. Corruption, larger or smaller, is widespread, it is a method of fulfilling particular interests. It was very common in the real-socialism economy, of which shortages were an immanent feature. In rural areas, meanwhile, resistance was supported by amoral familism and a network of complicated kinship- and neighbourhood-based relations, on which trust in “one’s own” was founded.

¹⁹⁷ Two Self-Defence Committees of Religious Believers and the Centre for Peasant Thought.

¹⁹⁸ The August Accords between the government of People’s Poland and the workers who were on strike in August 1980 were signed on 30 August in Szczecin, 31 August in Gdańsk and 3 September in Jastrzębie, and were the basis for the formation of the Solidarity Free Trade Union.

¹⁹⁹ The striking farmers’ demands were very broad, and this was reflected in the agreement. They were related to “land management, old-age pensions and insurance, supply of means of production,

the union's legalisation. The farmer trade union movement united in March 1981, and the Solidarity Individual Farmers' Free Trade Union was established at a congress in Poznań. It was registered thanks to an agreement (signed on 30 March 1981) that ended the "Bydgoszcz crisis",²⁰⁰ but not until 12 May 1981. Even after this registration, and especially in autumn 1981, this form of protest (sit-ins in public buildings) continued to be used quite often.²⁰¹

The farmer union's activity was suspended after 13 December 1981, and contestatory actions between this date (the imposition of martial law in Poland) and the Round Table talks in 1989 were very modest at best. This might be explained by geographic fragmentation, but also the lack of a central body of the movement, one contributing factor of which might have been the public self-criticism²⁰² offered by Farmers' Solidarity Chairman Jan Kułaj in April 1982. Underground activity was limited to the formation of a few structures that belonged to the National Committee of Farmers' Resistance; the activity of the Farmers' Chaplaincy run by the Catholic Church had a wider reach.

The farmer protests that began in 1989, in completely changed political circumstances, were triggered by the dire economic situation in agriculture during the post-communist transformation. Foryś (2019) distinguishes two waves of these protests: in the years 1989–1993 and 1997–2001. It is possible to identify cycles within these waves, i.e. sets of protest events characterised by phases of launching, intensification, reaching a culmination (number of actions, their character, type of demands), and subsiding. Foryś sees two cycles in the first wave: 1989–1991²⁰³ and 1992–1993. The latter involved three farmer trade unions: the Solidarity Individual Farmers' Free Trade Union (NSZZ RI

education in rural areas, the availability of loans. They obliged the government to introduce a number of laws and decrees by the end of the year ... One of the main principles was the protection of peasant farms" (Kozłowski, Olszok 2019, p. 637).

²⁰⁰ The Bydgoszcz crisis: "... in March 1981 the leadership of the newly formed union organised a sit-in at the United Peasant Party (ZSL) Provincial Board in Bydgoszcz. This protest coincided with the events of 19 March, when representatives of Solidarity, who had come to a session of the Provincial People's Council in Bydgoszcz, were beaten up. This led to the most serious crisis between Solidarity and the authorities. The crisis situation ended with the signing of the 'Warsaw Accords'" (ibid., p. 637).

²⁰¹ Others included a tax strike in September 1981, which was unsuccessful, and seizure of land that was owned by the "nationalised" sector.

²⁰² As suggested by publicised resources of the Institute of National Remembrance (IPN), another factor might have been more intensive Security Service (SB) surveillance of this community (compared to how numerous the farmer movement was).

²⁰³ In this case, the driving force of the movement was the Individual Farmers' Solidarity union; 1990, the year of the culmination of these actions, abounded in political events important for rural Poland: local-government elections after a 1990 law restored the empowerment of local self-government, and the "unification" of the peasant movement and the appearance of the "reborn" Polish Peasant Party (PSL) on the political scene.

Solidarność), the National Union of Farmers and Farmers' Associations and Organisations (KZRKiOR) and the most active one, established in 1991, i.e. the Samoobrona (Self-Defence) Agricultural Trade Union. The second wave included three cycles: the "grain" cycle (grain prices) in July–September 1998, the "pork" cycle in August–September 1999 and the "sugar" cycle in 2000, the names indicating the changed character of the protest. "The interests of particular producer groups, namely the owners of large, market-oriented farms, became especially prominent during this protest" (ibid., p. 615). Each wave featured two kinds of demand: economic changes and compensation, but each of them used a different repertoire of actions. These were many in the first wave, suggesting an ongoing search for the right forms, while the second wave was dominated by road blockades, demonstrations and clashes with the police. The responsibility for this radicalisation lay mainly with the Samoobrona union, which was also behind the winter 2003 protests organised in association with anti-European parties, contesting Poland's future European Union membership. After EU accession, protests became part of the regular catalogue of agricultural producer behaviours, they were sectoral in character and usually linked to the worsening economic situation of farms. Livestock and grain producers protested in 2008, dairy producers in 2015, and potato and vegetable producers in 2017 and 2018. A new form of protest emerged as well: "Euro-protests" staged in Brussels by representatives of particular agricultural sectors.

Looking at the contestatory actions of peasants and farmers, with the exception of the Great Peasant Strike in 1937 they were never mass operations. Throughout the century, the underlying reason was mainly economic: initially stemming from the agricultural question, later with the addition of various detailed issues of an economic nature, triggered by the state's policies or broader market processes. Some of them were "systemic", requiring legislative solutions. Political issues seldom motivated farmers to action and were usually tied to economic questions. The forms of protest changed as well: from boycotts, demonstrations and strikes, through road blockades, to spectacular "commando-type"²⁰⁴ actions involving the media. This was a consequence not only of these new behaviours being learned, but also of their adaptation to new technical possibilities at the same time as the occupational category in question was shrinking.

²⁰⁴ E.g. tipping agricultural produce or manure onto roads or in front of public institutions.

2.2. (Co-)creating the social order, or participatory subjectivity

Outlining his vision of the future of the peasantry and the continuance of peasant culture, Szczepański (1986, p. 20) writes: "Every history book says that social classes which do not take part in the exercise of power are subordinated and do not count". This reasoning can be taken metaphorically and applied to rural areas, where peasants formed the majority of residents for at least half of the period under consideration. Let us concentrate on the opportunities to influence the national social order through "conscious, intentional and rational actions targeted at other groups and at society as a whole" (Karwat 1980, p. 276), which are an expression of a political group's subjectivity/agency.

It is worth remembering that the opportunities to influence the development of the social order through social groups' political actions varied throughout the period being analysed, ranging from growing restrictions on such actions in the 1930s, to minimal or even no such possibilities in People's Poland. Here we will analyse the most widespread,²⁰⁵ selected manifestations of rural political agency, namely participation in parliamentary elections and the political preferences thus shown, and – against this background – the power of peasant and people's parties and their leaders' positions in the structure of power at the central level.

In a democratic system, "electoral participation constitutes a key form of political participation" (Pełczyńska-Nałęcz 2014, p. 315); it is, according to Dahl (2002), a necessary criterion for the existence of democracy, though elections also take place in undemocratic systems. It is not entirely clear what it signifies: whether it is an active form of support or an expression of conformist indifference. The extensive literature devoted to electoral participation (cf. Cześniak 2010) suggests two options for this involvement: "participatory", i.e. contributing to the development of the political system by direct participation (which is virtually impossible given the current size of societies, which could not fit into any agora), and "elitist", which is a competitive method of recruiting leadership.²⁰⁶ This involvement had different significance in different periods of the century under analysis, and the term "parliamentary elections" actually meant different things:

From the 1920s onwards, one can speak of: plebiscites organised by an authoritarian government (1930s); the unlearning of democracy due to

²⁰⁵ New studies point to other, contemporary forms of political pressure, and especially to the growing role of the Internet (cf. Mider 2010).

²⁰⁶ This is the "feedback theory of democracy" (Sartori 1994, cited by: Cześniak 2010, p. 16).

violation of its elementary principles during the fraudulent votes of 1946–47;²⁰⁷ the enforcement of active participation in the totalisation of social life, but treating the participants instrumentally (1952–54); a plebiscite to modify the political order in accordance with the political line of Władysław Gomułka and against the Stalinist model or the excessively risky rejection of “real socialism” (1957); the ritual casting of ballots without crossing anyone off, practised by a large part of society (though very likely not by 99% as electoral commissions reported) in the 1960s and 1970s. In all of these cases, society chose neither its representatives nor its political programme. The great social movement in August 1980 changed this state of affairs ... Statistical analyses of voter turnout in the years 1984–1988 ... show that social behaviour was very similar in all these cases. A considerable group of people, which grew in years of temporary normalcy and shrank when normalcy collapsed, declared loyalty to the authorities of the time. This trend included mainly the rural and agricultural community, handicapped by industrialisation and social development processes (Florczyk, Żukowski 1990, p. 277 et seq.).

Let us concentrate on two periods of electoral participation in the Second and Third Republics that can be analysed in this aspect. Besides the rather obvious yet sad conclusion regarding the considerable difference in participation in elections by the Polish population as a whole and by rural residents, we can see that willingness to be a part of decision-making and to take responsibility for such decisions decreased significantly in the Third Republic. Even in the breakthrough elections in 1989 (which were more of a plebiscite), voter turnout did not exceed the level typical for the inter-war period: only 62% of eligible voters took part. Generally speaking, the turnout was lower in rural areas than in towns/cities, but it varied greatly by region: it was just 53% in the rural Ostrołęckie province, and as high as 71.4% in the similar Leszczyńskie province (Białecki, Heyns 1990).²⁰⁸ Researchers have suggested that this diversity was mainly due to cultural and social factors. “Turnout was higher in those regions of the country where more people went to church, towns and villages were better managed, and where a tradition of peasant opposition movements had developed and been preserved” (Florczyk, Żukowski 1990, p. 279).

²⁰⁷ The “3 times yes” referendum.

²⁰⁸ The analysis by Andrzej Florczyk and Tomasz Żukowski (1990, p. 294) indicates that factors such as agricultural production, private farming and a population of post-working age had a negative impact on voter turnout; a positive impact came from factors like a farming population, religiousness and a tradition of peasant resistance.

Each period (Table 9) displays different relationships between rural and urban participation. In the Second Republic, voter turnout²⁰⁹ was higher in rural areas than in towns/cities; this was also true of the 1935 and 1938 elections, which were boycotted by the Peasant Party. This tendency was reversed in the Third Republic: the proportion of rural residents taking part in electoral consultations has been lower than that for urban dwellers, sometimes considerably – in 2019 it was 44% in rural compared to 62% in urban areas. One of the reasons mentioned for this is poorer access to electoral districts in rural areas, but it seems questionable in the light of the turnout in the inter-war period, when this accessibility was much worse. The most likely reason for lower rural participation is the combined influence of social situation factors:

Better-educated people became involved in electoral participation much more often ... Action of this kind was also more often undertaken by better-off citizens. Electoral participation was thus fulfilled to a much greater extent by groups with higher social status. Less educated and less affluent categories, on the other hand, were more inclined to give up such activity. However, the elite nature of electoral participation is in no way unique to Poland but has been recorded in most democratic countries (Pełczyńska-Nałęcz 2014, p. 320 et seq.).

The rural electorate's weaker interest in parliamentary elections would thus be the effect of poorer education and lower average income (cf. Chapter 1). The next component of rural residents' electoral participation, i.e. the direction of their choices, also has a rural stigma, namely the share of votes for "peasant parties", which actually represented different political orientations and entered into various post-election coalitions. Such parties were a significant influence in rural Poland in the inter-war period, though looking at the rural social structure (see Chapter 1), the results are mediocre given that the peasant population represented 70% of the rural population. The political right wing has been a strong competitor for rural votes. In the 1922 elections, right-wing and centrist parties won almost 43% of rural votes; in 1928 the Nonpartisan Bloc for Cooperation with the Government (BBWR, affiliated with Józef Piłsudski) and the national-democratic National Party (SN) won over 36%, and 52% in 1930

²⁰⁹ It is extremely difficult to determine the rural turnout accurately; it varied greatly depending on the region of the Poland of the time, and furthermore, it was sometimes reconstructed on the basis of votes cast for Polish election lists or only in ethnically Polish regions. The most complete statistical data exists for the 1922 elections.

Table 9.

Voter turnout and votes cast for “peasant” parties in rural areas and seats thus won

Election year	Voter turnout (%) [*]		Peasant parties' election result		Peasant parties
	Poland	rural Poland	seats ^{**}	votes (%)	
1922	68	78	44	27.2	PSL “Piast” + PSL “Wyzwolenie” + PSL “Lewica” + Chłopskie Stronnictwo Radykalne
1928	78	84	36	19.6	PSL “Piast” + PSL “Wyzwolenie” + Stronnictwo Chłopskie
1930	75	71/78 ^a	39 ^b	16.7	PSL “Piast” + PSL “Wyzwolenie” + Stronnictwo Chłopskie – they make up* the Centrolew alliance
1935	46	70	boycott of the elections		Stronnictwo Ludowe
1938	67	n/a			
1947	fraudulent elections; according to official data: 143 seats				PSL + Stronnictwo Ludowe + PSL “Nowe Wyzwolenie”
1989	63 ^c	n/a	76	16.5	Zjednoczone Stronnictwo Ludowe (ZSL)
1991	41	35	17	15.6	PSL Porozumienie Ludowe + PSL Sojusz Programowy
1993	50	45	48	27.6	PSL
1997	46	31	19	5.6	
2001	44	43	37	20.6	PSL + “Samoobrona”
2005	39	36	35	17.6	
2007	53	45	17	6.7	PSL
2011	49	42	17	5.6	
2015	51	45	9	3.5	
2019	62	44	9 ^d	6.5	

^a Turnout in ethnically Polish areas (from: Hass 1983).

^b Votes cast for the Centrolew alliance.

^c Turnout in the first round.

^d Including the Kukiz'15 group.

Source: own compilation and calculations based on:

* 1922–1938 – *Zarys historii Polski w liczbach* (GUS 2012, p. 53); 1991–2007 – *ibid.*, p. 60; 2011–2019 – National Electoral Commission (PKW) data; rural turnout: 1922–1928 – Szczechura 1968; 1930 – *Statystyka wyborów... 1935; 1935 r.* – Hass 1983; 1991–2019 – PKW data.

** Borkowski 1980; Ptak 2019; PKW data. The Sejm had 444 members in 1922–1930, 208 members in 1935–1938, 444 in 1947, and 460 in the Third Republic.

(BBWR and SN). The Peasant Party (SL)²¹⁰ did not take part in the subsequent elections, i.e. 1935 and 1938, deciding to boycott them. In view of the voter turnout in 1935 (Table 9), the boycott was not a success for this party.²¹¹

In the Third Republic, in completely new political circumstances, "peasant parties" seemed to regain importance, mainly as a result of the political about-turn of the United Peasant Party (ZSL)²¹² following the 1989 elections. Alongside this actor, which had been present in rural Poland in various forms since 1895 (Zalewski 2019), new peasant/people's actors originating from the Solidarity movement appeared on the political stage: PSL "Solidarność", which later became the Peasant-Christian Party (Stronnictwo Ludowo-Chrześcijańskie), and the PSL Peasant Alliance (PSL "Porozumienie Ludowe"). They disappeared from the political scene in the second half of the 1990s, and now rural interests seem to be represented mainly by the PSL, formed from the erstwhile ZSL. Tomasz Zarycki (1997) believes that one of the fundamental cleavages on the Polish political scene is the division into urban and rural areas.²¹³ The character of this political cleavage is influenced by "the clear definition of rural interests through the activity of a peasant party that is quite cohesive by Polish standards, i.e. the PSL" (ibid., p. 217), which supposedly served to strengthen this division. This prognosis has turned out to be only partially accurate: a uniqueness of rural political orientations exists, but it has not been due to the PSL, and not even due to "peasant parties".

The special nature of political divisions along the urban-rural axis, not only in Central and Eastern Europe during the post-communist transformation, has been shown in many studies (Bański, Kowalski, Mazur 2009). In Poland this was a time of intensified searches for political options capable of noticing the (changing) interests of rural Poland's residents. "Not only peasant parties tried to represent rural interests, but all those that saw rural areas as an undefined territory where they might win over new voters" (Szpyt 2011, p. 84).

²¹⁰ The Peasant Party (SL) was formed on 15 March 1931. It comprised the former PSL "Wyzwolenie", PSL "Piast" and Stronnictwo Chłopskie parties.

²¹¹ Historians (Borkowski 1980; Hass 1983) indicate that the official results of these elections are unreliable in view of various kinds of political and administrative pressure having been exerted as well as incentives from the Catholic Church.

²¹² After the elections of 4 June 1989, the ZSL and the Democratic Party (SD), both satellites of the PZPR communist party, joined the Civic Committee's side to form a government coalition, which made it possible to appoint the Tadeusz Mazowiecki government, the first non-communist cabinet (1989-1990).

²¹³ The other axis is the values axis (left wing-right wing). "Of the four cleavages proposed by Lipset and Rokkan, the Polish division along the 'values' axis in some aspects would appear to come closest to the Church versus state cleavage. There is no doubt that it is one of the main correlates of political attitudes on the axis of values" (Zarycki 1997, p. 217).

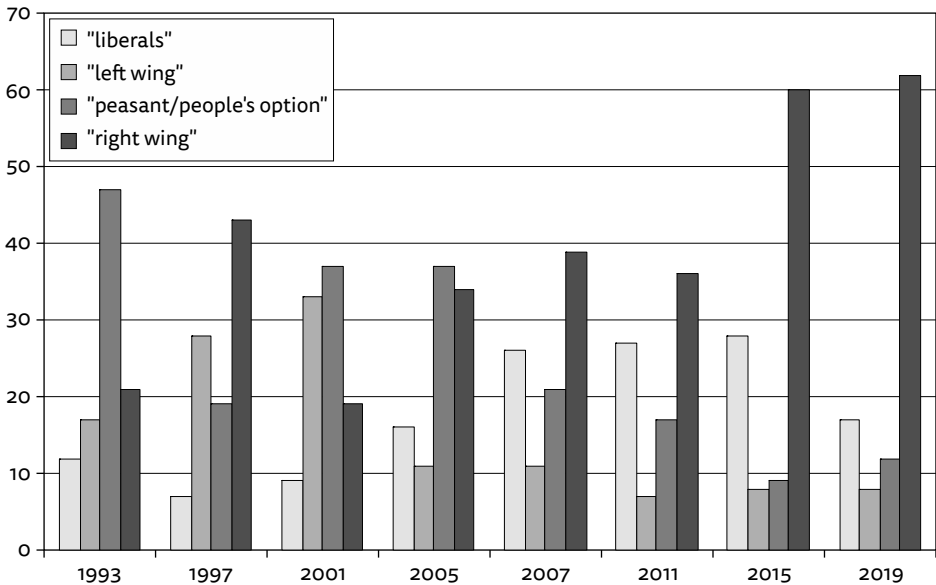


Figure 22.
Evolution of rural residents' political choices²¹⁴ 1993–2019

Source: own work based on: Bański, Kowalski, Mazur 2009 for elections in 1993–2007 and PKW data for elections in 2011–2019.

Whereas rural residents gave preference to the peasant/people's option at the start of the Third Republic, from 2005 their support for the right-wing grew from one election to the next.²¹⁵ It reached 60% in the last two elections. On the other hand, support for the peasant/people's option decreased; it owed its high support from the 2001 and 2005 elections to Samoobrona, and if we exclude this radical component,²¹⁶ its support had already started to decline

²¹⁴ The division for the 1993–2007 period has been adopted from: Bański, Kowalski, Mazur 2009. The divisions in the following years have been reconstructed along the same lines; thus: the liberal option is taken to include the PO (Civic Platform), Nowoczesna (Modern Party), KO (Civic Coalition); the left-wing option is the SLD (Democratic Left Alliance), the UP (Labour Union), Zjednoczona Lewica (United Left), Lewica Razem (Left Together); the peasant/people's option is the PSL; the right-wing option is PiS (Law and Justice), Kukiz'15, KORWiN, Konfederacja Narodowa (National Confederation). These are names of parties and election coalitions that ran in the elections in 2011, 2015 and 2019. The Kukiz'15 group is a special case hard to classify, as they voted like the right wing during the 2015–2019 term but ran in the 2019 elections in a coalition with the PSL.

²¹⁵ This radical right-wing turn is noticeable in all the Visegrád Group countries. Its first wave came during democratisation, when minority groups demanded rights for themselves, including political rights, and during EU accession, when the motif of the EU "restricting countries' sovereignty" appeared in the debate. The second wave arose in connection with the Syrian crisis and the wave of refugees making their way to the EU in 2015 (cf. Bušítková 2018).

²¹⁶ Samoobrona won 17.2% of rural votes in 2001, 20.5% in 2005 and 3% in 2007.

in 1997. Several factors caused the change in political preferences, including major ones like Poland's improved economic situation and the increasing fulfilment of rural residents' financial needs, especially after Poland joined the EU. This is reflected in the initial popularity of left-wing options and its subsequent decline. The next important factor was the almost revolutionary change in the social-occupational structure of rural areas in the Third Republic: a drop in the proportion of farmers, an increase in workers, and the "propagation" of the middle class (about a quarter of rural residents). As a result, support for the peasant/people's option is decreasing, though these parties have often been the element that tipped the scales in the formation of government coalitions.²¹⁷ As Jerzy Głuszyński (2014, p. 218 et seq.) pointed out, this enabled them "to achieve political benefits incomparable with their position";²¹⁸ at the same time, the minority share of these parties gave them "greater possibilities to block changes proposed by the bigger coalition partner than to force their own draft proposals on that partner". Peasant/people's parties have been deprived of even this small influence since the 2015 elections, when PiS won enough votes nationwide to govern by itself. The growing support for this party since it first appeared on the political scene (from rural support of 5.8% in the 2001 elections to 56.1% in 2019) is proof that, with its populist slogans and subsequent policies, PiS fits in well with the political preferences of rural residents. However, the PSL still has a strong position in local and regional government.

Looking at these changes in rural residents' political preferences, we may see a repetition of their pattern of evolution in the two periods considered here, i.e. the Second and the Third Republic. Though the circumstances were different, rural residents' support for right-wing political orientations and either authoritarian governments or ones inclining towards authoritarianism grew in each of these two periods. And in both periods, such right-wing options invoked patriotism, nationalism and Catholicism as well as finding support in the Catholic Church. It is therefore worth pointing to the second axis of Polish political divisions described by Zarycki (1997): the left wing–right wing value axis; the right-wing extreme is characterised by a high level of religiousness.

²¹⁷ There was a peasant/people's party in all the government coalitions up to 2015: either the PSL, Porozumienie Ludowe, Stronnictwo Konserwatywno-Ludowe, or Samoobrona.

²¹⁸ As an example: in the Third Republic up to 2020, 12 of the 18 ministers of agriculture came from various "peasant/people's parties".

2.3. Agency or subordination of rural areas?

What has rural Poland's political orientation been, and what impact have rural areas had on Poland's political profile? It is quite widely believed that it is impossible to win elections and govern in Poland without the votes of rural residents. This is definitely true with regard to the inter-war period, when the majority of the Polish population lived in the countryside. In People's Poland the impact of rural areas was different: they influenced Poland's political picture mainly through contestatory activity; passive resistance was a widespread form of this, "moderating" the pace and direction of the changes implemented. "Rural residents had to adjust to the conditions imposed on them, and wherever these were unbearable, they had to resist. For long years, the mechanism of peasant resistance was the principal political behaviour of rural residents" (Głuszyński 2014, p. 200). Until 2015, the situation was more nuanced in the Third Republic: you did not have to win the elections in rural areas to govern, but you did need the support of a peasant party. Such support was not important enough for rural areas to build and implement "their own" politics using only their own political capacity. In his questions regarding the role of rural areas in political change, Głuszyński (ibid., p. 215) goes even further:

The most important political changes (the transformation of the political system and Poland's EU accession) were accompanied by a rather defensive attitude of rural residents. They are the beneficiaries of changes that they did not necessarily want beforehand. Since they have grown happy with them over time (which is particularly evident in the case of EU membership), the question arises: are rural residents capable of taking political decisions that would benefit them?

3. Rural space as a frame and moderator of social processes

Space is a category often used in the social sciences. The issue of space is so well-grounded in social sciences that "there is no theory of space that is not an integral part of a general social theory, even an implicit one" (Castells 1982, p. 123). The term "space" itself has many meanings. "Space is an abstract idea (mathematical space), a property of matter (physical space), a natural environment developed in a certain way in the course of evolution (natural, geographical space) and, finally, it is a human, anthropogenic

and cultural product, i.e. one produced by human individuals, groups and communities (social, cultural space)" (Jałowiecki 2010, p. 19). In our case, the focus will be on space produced and processed by human beings, which also comprises the natural environment, also affected by individual and collective human activity. It encompasses "the social relations of reproduction, i.e. the biophysiological relations between the sexes and between age groups, along with the specific organisation of the family, and the relations of production, i.e. the division of labour and its organisation in the form of hierarchical social functions" (Lefebvre 1974, p. 41, cited in: Jałowiecki 2010, p. 22). It is therefore not just the frame within which social life unfolds, but also an active factor capable of modifying social processes. The active (most often negative) impact of rural space on collective and individual lives in the period under analysis has been described in many studies; it was the effect of the accessibility of space and the functions assigned to it, which were mainly production-related. The adjective "rural" added to the notion of "space" also refers us to "a vision of social divisions, it opens certain ideas about the social world" (Mormont 1996, p. 163) – as shown above, regarding the economy, culture and politics.

Rural space occupies most of Poland's area; in the statistics of land use, the land area, which has been about 312,000 sq. km since the end of World War II, is usually divided into three categories: arable land, forest land and other land. In the popular understanding, rural space comprises arable land and forests. This area decreased by 10 percentage points in the period under analysis, from 90% of Poland's area to 80%. The share of other land, which comprises built-up areas, urbanised areas (including land occupied by infrastructure), wasteland etc., doubled from 10% to 20%. The two components making up rural space, arable land and forests, evolved each in their own way: the forested area grew (by about 6 percentage points) while arable land shrank (by over 15 percentage points). One could summarise these data by saying that Poland underwent deruralisation, while rural areas underwent deagrarianisation as the amount of arable land diminished; the average per capita arable land area shrank from 0.9 to 0.4 hectares in the period under analysis.

In this part of the analysis, our attention will mainly focus on the process of marking the space, i.e. giving it specific characteristics, and its evolution as a result of individual and collective actions. This stems from the fact that space as well as its perception and understanding are historically variable. This also applies to rural space, as "rurality is not some kind of 'gift', but a social construction of the world based on people's ideas and the evolving

practices of identification and interpretation, which becomes our key for reading the changes experienced by the whole of society” (Regnault, de Sartre, Regnault-Roger 2012, p. 11).

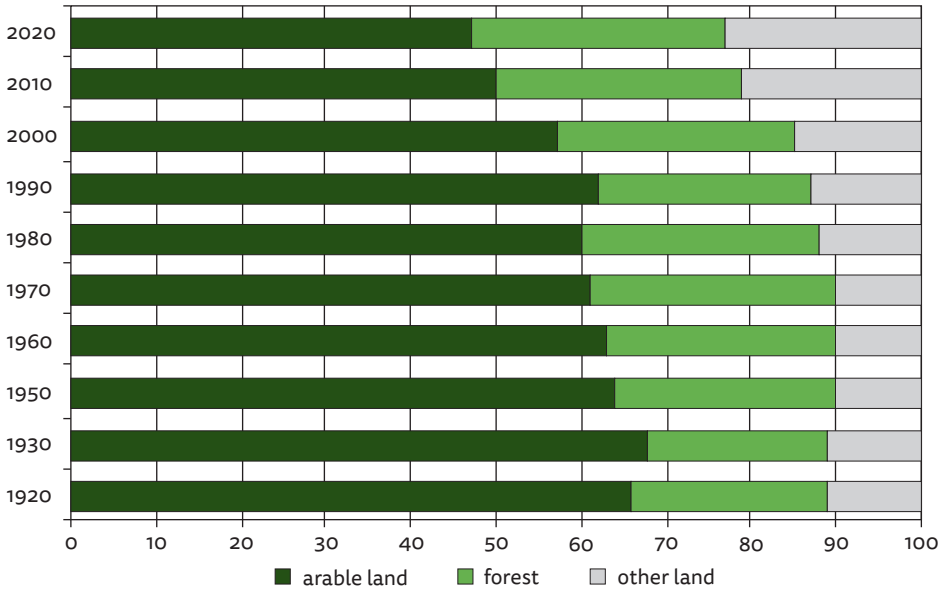


Figure 23.
Evolution of land use 1921–2010

Source: own work based on GUS 2012.

3.1. Denaturalisation and renaturalisation of rural space

Rural space is linked to or even identified with nature, with the natural environment, not only in the popular imagination. However, the actual notion of nature changes with a changing society:

Not without some schematism and simplification, changes in understanding nature are usually presented in terms of the succession of three stages: (1) a state of no differentiation between the natural order and the cultural order, typical of “primitive” and “traditional” societies; (2) the differentiation between and juxtaposition of the orders of nature and culture (society, humankind), typical of modern societies; (3) renewed inclusion of humankind (culture) in the natural order understood as an “ecosystem”, typical of post-industrial societies (Giza-Poleszczuk 1991, p. 194).

In the pre-industrial Second Republic, rural residents treated space as the natural environment of human beings, of which the latter were part, which was reflected in peasant culture. Agricultural sciences pointed to the necessity of humans working together with the forces of nature; this was the context not only for analysing the intensification of agricultural production, but also for formulating the theoretical foundations of rational management of the forces of nature.²¹⁹ At the same time, love of the native natural environment, which was developed under the partitions, was a patriotic stance. A system for protecting nature started being built back then, because “during this period, nature and natural resources were an element of national identity, subject to protection out of patriotic feelings” (Bańkowska 2019, p. 807). All over the world, industrialisation and modernisation processes resulted in an instrumental approach to nature, almost exclusively as a means to an end. Nature was desacralised and treated as an object, becoming something having only utility value, put to work for the capitalist economy. The rules governing this economy, mainly including the necessity to estimate the production costs and the costs of reproducing individual factors of production (social, natural and technological), defined the attitude towards nature. In Poland the industrialisation and modernisation that created an industrial society took place in the period of the “centrally planned socialist economy”, which made their character unique. The Marxist idea of “ruling over nature” merged with the Catholic message “to subdue the earth”. The overriding idea of social practice was now “to tame, to subjugate, to repress; in other words, humankind was exercising ever greater and stronger rule over the course of phenomena in the world (whether natural or social)” (Giza-Poleszczuk 1991, p. 197). Nature was subordinated to social goals and made to work towards their fulfilment. At the same time, this system included no protective barriers (such as private ownership or economic rationality), which led to communist dissolution,²²⁰ meaning “economic entities’ inability to rationally calculate their own economic actions in a situation where the factors involved in production are there ‘for free’ or are impossible to estimate” (ibid., p. 209).

²¹⁹ “It is precisely the theoretical foundation of physiotactics, i.e. the idea according to which ‘nature conservation becomes a synonym of truly rational, protective and constantly supervised management of nature’s productive forces’ (Prof. Wodiczko), developed in Poland in the two inter-war decades, that we can find 100 years later in the idea of sustainable development” (Bańkowska 2019, p. 810).

²²⁰ Dissolution is a category describing the mechanisms of functioning of the feudal economy. Referring to Witold Kula (1983), Giza-Poleszczuk writes: “Thus the essence of dissolution in feudalism is: (1) a lack of signs operating in advance and informing about the conditions and effects of economic management; (2) in consequence, the sinking of these signs to a natural, purely physical level: ruin, death, peasant escapes. In the communist system, economic entities (the state) are in an analogous situation”.

In view of the fact that there were no mechanisms worked out under capitalism that would restrict the use of nature, this led to enormous exploitation of nature, all the way to physical destruction of resources, which was treated as a temporary and passing inconvenience. This was how natural resources were used by all of the “socialist” economy, which caused the degradation of the natural environment across a large area of the country.²²¹ The factors contributing to this included agriculture, which underwent intensification in the 1960s with the introduction of artificial fertilisers (their use was mandatory as of 1967) and chemical pesticides. Examples of the way nature was used almost solely in utilitarian terms include air, soil and water pollution, lignite and sulphur strip mines, but also wasteful management of arable land (Fig. 23). This made up 20,440,000 hectares or 66% of Poland’s area in 1950, and 15,534,000 hectares or 49.7% in 2010. The arable area decreased by five million hectares in the course of 60 years. This process began in the 1960s and is still progressing; the abrupt drop in the first decade of the 21st century was the effect of the changed definition of arable land.²²²

At the same time, due to the information blockade introduced by the communist authorities and the lack of ecological education, people were unaware of the poor condition of the natural environment; the countryside was associated with nature, clean air and the availability of food. Studies show (Gliński 1998; Majchrowska 2013; Tuszyńska 2013) that awareness of environmental threats was intuitive, while actions undertaken in specific situations, according to Tadeusz Burger (1984), were incidental fear responses. The sense of such threats’ existence was low, especially among rural residents, due to the low level of education as well as the limited reach of oppositionist publications, which seldom discussed these issues anyway.

Almost half a century of treating nature like this, on top of many pretend campaigns for its protection²²³ and the lack of ecological education, left a lasting trace in society’s attitudes, as revealed in the third stage mentioned above, i.e. the stage when humankind and nature become elements of a shared world. “Respect for nature” becomes an important category in post-industrial society, even though it is:

²²¹ As Katarzyna Bańkowska (2019) reports, 10–15% of Poland’s area was affected by chemical contamination of the soil and flora.

²²² In 2007 the definition of arable land was adjusted to the EUROSTAT dataset of “utilised agricultural area”. This meant that “arable land” now excluded unused agricultural land, which had been growing since the 1990s.

²²³ Various environmental protection institutions were set up, such as the State Nature Protection Council (1947) and the Nature Protection Guard (1957); numerous laws were also passed.

instrumental in character; it appeals to the mind, not the emotions. If people refrain from certain actions (e.g. the use of insecticides), it is not because they think it is unethical towards nature but because they consider it irrational from the point of view of their own best interests (Giza-Poleszczuk 1991, p. 196).

This stance has been expressed in the idea of sustainable development, and has translated into various policies in the developed world, especially in the European Union. In Poland, and not only in its rural part, approval for these ideas has been resisted not only by average citizens but also people representing the authorities or the Catholic Church.²²⁴ In the 21st century, farmers' attitudes towards nature and the environment are being forced to change, mainly by the Common Agricultural Policy, even though it includes mutually contradictory elements.²²⁵ Moreover, the CAP's pro-ecological actions are not popular with farmers, while EU directives (e.g. on animal welfare or, lately, carbon dioxide emissions) are implemented with the maximum possible delay. These attitudes are changing among the younger generation, as a result of ecological education, social movements and fashions, among other things. However, these are instrumental changes: research shows that the percentage of people who think economic considerations are the most important reasons to protect the environment is growing, while the proportion of those who consider nature to be a value in itself is shrinking.

During the century under analysis the attitude towards nature and the environment came full circle, or so it might seem. "This turnaround undoubtedly has not been a purely selfless occurrence: rather, it is based on people noticing the reciprocal impact and self-destructive character of the exploitation of nature, recognising that natural resources are limited and that the expansion of civilisation entails a multitude of dangers" (ibid., p. 196). However, awareness of the necessity for change is not widespread in Polish society, which currently has many times more possibilities for intervention. This necessity is very often ignored by the economic and political elites, who argue that changing the attitude to nature is a luxury that only the rich can afford. The dissemination

²²⁴ The environment minister ordered... the deforestation of the Białowieża Forest, a unique forest complex in Europe (and was only stopped by the EU), while the Catholic station Radio Maryja (and personally its director Rev. Rydzyk) fights against "ecologism", comparing it to Nazism. Piquancy is added to this situation by the fact that the teachings of Vatican Council II as well as popes Paul VI, John Paul II and Francis are being ignored not just by Polish society but also by the Catholic clergy.

²²⁵ Bańkowska (2019) believes that the structure of most CAP support instruments is "productivist": it encourages concentration of production, increased productivity and greater competitiveness in agricultural production.

of the new stance towards the environment, especially in light of the discussion above, appears to be difficult in Polish, and not only rural, society.

3.2. Organising space: controlled and spontaneous processes

Ever since humans began adopting a settled way of life, they have organised the surrounding space. This organisation was individual and collective. The space analysed here is described by the adjective “rural” and is related to the notion of “rural area” and “countryside”. These have varied historically. They can be variously defined even today, also in official statistics (cf. Depraz 2008). The definition used in Poland is administrative: a rural area means anything that is not a city or town. Without getting into a debate about this – somewhat debatable – approach, let us say that rural space does have its boundaries: these are defined by the administrative borders of towns and cities. The latter grew in number during the century in question. There were 611 cities/towns in 1939, 703 in 1947 and 930 in 2019. However, rural space has been dissected by other administrative boundaries important for the process of “organising space”. The number of voivodeships/provinces (political-administrative regions) changed over time. There were 16 in the inter-war period, divided into the central, eastern, western and southern provinces. After the territorial changes in the wake of World War II, the number of provinces changed many times, as if the authorities were searching for the optimal space for governing. There were 16 of them in 1948, then 19, then 22, then 49 from 1975, a number that remained until 1999, when the next/latest territorial reform divided Poland into 16 provinces (regions). Spatial management was most affected by the formation of 49 provinces in 1975 and their subsequent abolition in 1999, since provinces were the units responsible for regional planning. Changes at the local level were no less important. A brief reminder: there were 3,195 rural communes in the late 1930s and 2,994 in 1948. The 1955 local administrative reform created 8,790 *gromada* units, which gradually started merging. In 1973 the 4,671 existing *gromada* units were transformed into 2,327 rural and urban-rural communes. Obviously, these changes had to be followed by changes in spatial (i.e. town-and-country) planning concepts and in the authorisation to manage planning, which was not conducive to a coherent spatial vision, and even less to its implementation.

The organisation of space in Poland has been multi-level: national, regional and local. Sometimes draft plans considered urban and rural areas separately, and at other times, especially lately, together:

During Poland's century of statehood, several town-and-country planning concepts were implemented. The results were varied, but all of them assumed spatial development and the levelling out of differences in the spatial structure of regions... They defined the main paradigms of spatial development and provided a benchmark for other planning documents (Bański 2019, p. 743).

Poland's space was extremely varied in 1918, and uniting it was the fundamental task of the time. Three projects played an enormous role in this: the construction of the seaport in Gdynia, the construction of a main railway line connecting this port with Silesia and its rich coal resources in the south, and the construction of the Central Industrial District (COP). For strategic reasons,²²⁶ this last project was located in rural areas in southern Poland, in an agricultural region with a huge labour surplus. This industrial hub provided jobs to many rural residents, leading to the "diversification of household incomes, the development of social infrastructure etc. The development of the COP was halted by the outbreak of World War II, but after the war ended the hub brought economic revival to the region's rural areas once again" (ibid., p. 744). Poland faced slightly different challenges after World War II. In 1944 the decree on the planned spatial management of Poland envisaged separate areas for different sectors of the economy, distribution of the population (among other things, by moving inhabitants from overpopulated regions of central Poland and from regions now lying across the eastern border to territories from which Germans were resettling), and a new administrative division of the country. The National Plan Conditions based on this division distinguished areas that were meant to fulfil agricultural, forestry and tourist functions. Rural areas were assigned agricultural functions above all, and there were plans to set up separate areas as a food base for cities, animal husbandry areas as well as intensive farming zones in the buffer zones of cities and new industrial centres. The planning work was halted in 1949, after which different ministries dealt with spatial management until the 1970s,²²⁷ when the authorities went back to spatial planning. The plan prepared at the time was based on the concept of moderate polycentric concentration, in which developing cities (the capitals of the new provinces) served as "centres of economic, social and cultural progress", according to Jerzy Bański. There were plans for the deconcentration of industry and an active role in development for agriculture and tourism. These

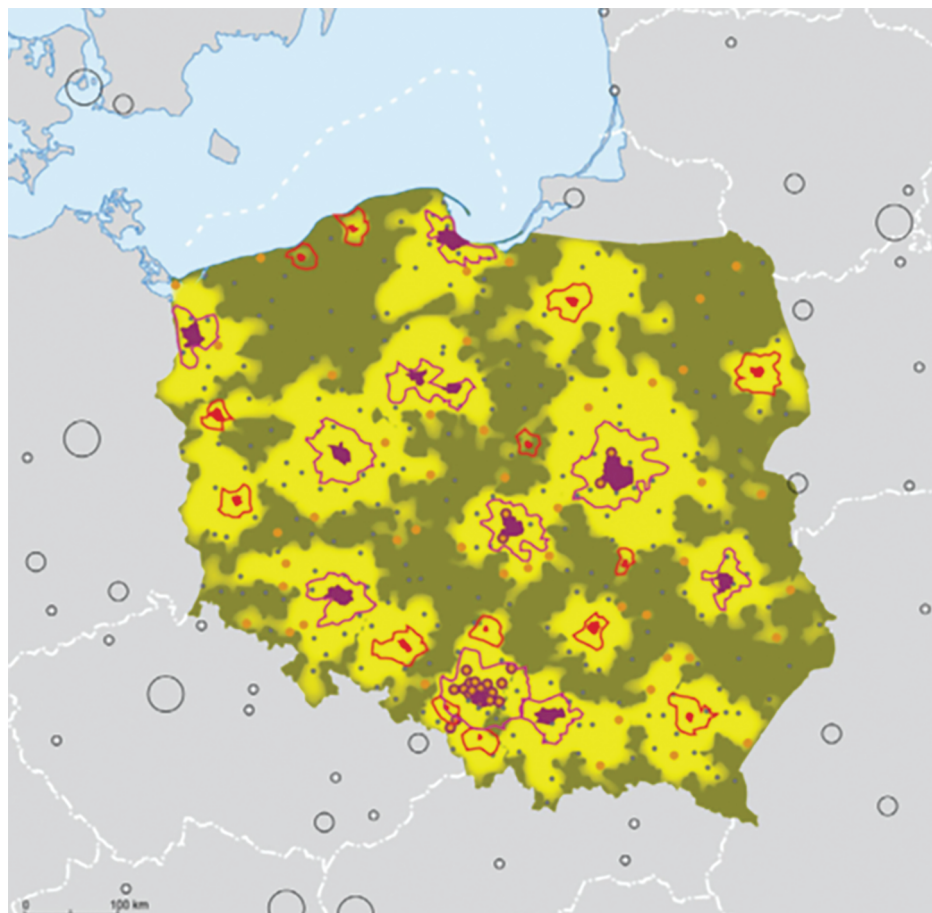
²²⁶ The area lay beyond the reach of the German and Soviet air forces.

²²⁷ A characterisation of such a model of rural development can be found in Philippe Perrier-Cornet (2001). It was quite widespread in Europe, and treated as a natural and automatic effect of the modernisation of agriculture.

ideas were mostly never put into practice. Despite this, over 30 urban centres developed quite intensively, starting to fulfil the role of new regional centres – provinces. Under their influence, the surrounding rural areas changed as well. A new spatial planning project was developed at the Government Centre for Strategic Studies in the late 1990s. This was included in the European financial framework, in the belief that “Polish space should be a keystone of Europe’s integration processes” (ibid., p. 750). The theory of polarised development was adopted as the basis for transforming the space, the leading role being played by urban growth centres from which the diffusion of innovation was to take place. The updated *National Spatial Development Concept 2030* (MRR 2011) evidently moves away from sectoral and towards territorial spatial management. It provides for the development of different types of functional space, i.e. areas with shared geographical, territorial and socio-economic conditions, characterised by a system of functional ties. It distinguishes two types of functional area: urban and rural. The latter can be split into two types: rural functional areas participating in development processes, where the functional zones of provincial capitals are also distinguished, and areas threatened with peripherality and marginalisation, which require support for development processes (Fig. 24). However, it seems obvious that this cannot be effective in all cases, which means depopulation of such areas; this process has already begun in most of them.

Agriculture, and particularly changes in the agrarian structure, has played a very important role in the organisation of space. The two agricultural reforms, the inter-war one and the communist one, both left their mark. The former, which was spread over time, was a controlled process during which the rules changed²²⁸ regarding the maximum areas not subject to the reform and compensation for land parcelled out. A reminder: a total of 2,655,000 hectares of land was parcelled out, on which more than 150,000 new farms were set up and 500,000 existing ones were enlarged. From 1923, parallel to the parcellation of landed estates, fragmented land was merged, often to peasant protests. This involved over 5,500,000 hectares of land and about 800,000 farms. The two processes changed the layout of fields: the area of manor farms decreased, the number of peasant farms increased and their land was marked out. At the same time, however, agrarian overpopulation caused splitting of farms and further fragmentation, especially during the Great Depression and particularly of smaller farms (cf. Chapter 2). World War II

²²⁸ Two agricultural reform acts were passed: one dated 15 July 1920, the other dated 28 December 1925; they changed the rules of parcellation and the payments for land parcelled out.



Categories of urban centres

- metropolitan
- regional
- subregional
- subregional within urban functional area boundaries
- local

Urban functional areas

- metropolitan (mandatorily designated in provincial development plans – PZPW)
- regional (optional)

Rural functional areas

- in the process of integration with main cities
- threatened with peripherality

Note:

The map shows the approximate extent. Areas in the process of integration with main cities have been mapped on the basis of the proportion of people commuting to work, based on GUS data.

Figure 24.

Types of rural functional areas in the second decade of the 21st century

Source: MRR 2011, p. 172.

marked an interlude between agrarian reforms; wartime destruction aside, it also brought new agricultural territories shaped by a different historical trajectory. The second “radical” reform from 1944 abolished manor farms. Without any compensation, the state seized farms of over 50 hectares in pre-war Polish territory and of over 100 hectares in the incorporated Northern and Western Territories (Fig. 1, p. 16). Despite these two agrarian operations, the structure of family farms remained fragmented: in 1950 over 60% of “individual” (private) farms were under five hectares and just 4.2% were over 15 hectares. As a result of “defective modernisation”, this structure changed very slowly right up to 1990. Changes accelerated after that, and the polarisation of farms began, as the proportion of farms of over 15 hectares increased as well.

The area occupied by individual farming evolved after World War II. This sector occupied 93% of arable land in 1946, 77% in 1955, 87% in 1960, 76% in 1990 and 88% in 2010. These figures succinctly outline the evolution of the “nationalised agricultural sector”, called the public sector after 1990. Its formation began in 1949 with the establishment of almost 6,000 state farms, which occupied an area of about two million hectares. This area grew gradually, to twice this figure in 1990. Their organisational structure was changed several times, but the basic unit was always a large-scale farm; these were organised (merged or split) into various structures. The collectivisation episode in Poland, which left a strong mark on the social awareness, left only a small trace in the statistics: a sudden drop in privately (“individually”) used arable land between 1946 and 1955, and rapid growth in 1960. Throughout the People’s Poland period, farming cooperatives occupied only a small area: about 4% of arable land.

The changes in rural space caused by agriculture were mostly controlled processes, designed by the state. This was the nature of both the pre-war agricultural reforms and the merging of land. A different form of control and pressure came into play in People’s Poland: the area limit for “individual” farms as well as psychological pressure manifested in the term *kulak*, which was revived after each return to the idea of the “nationalisation of agriculture”. This “nationalisation” was ultimately abandoned, among other things thanks to peasant resistance. However, processes of change in the agrarian structure that would have resulted from modernisation were blocked and deformed: what took place was “growth without development”, to invoke the findings of Waldemar Kuczyński (1981). The processes changing the agrarian structure remained under state control in the Third Republic. One such process was the privatisation of state farms, especially at the farm restructuring stage, i.e.

when farms were divided into parts and the sale of land was restricted, which aimed to weaken large-scale farms. In the second decade of the 21st century, changes in the agrarian structure were more strictly controlled again, mainly by being blocked.²²⁹ A special body has been set up to oversee these changes: the National Support Centre for Agriculture (KOWR) (cf. section 2.2).

3.3. "Civilising" rural space

The social sciences have several ways of defining the concept of "civilisation"; one quite popular definition says it is "the level of development attained by a society in a given historical era, with special emphasis on the level of material culture".²³⁰ Writing about civilising rural space, I refer to this particular definition: civilising rural space means saturating it with technical elements of material culture, also known as material infrastructure, namely:

all of the physical fittings that serve to provide inhabitants, institutions and entrepreneurs with basic resources (water, power etc.). It is a system of fittings having an ancillary role in relation to other spatial systems; to ensure the best possible functioning of the national economy, it has to be compatible with the expectations and needs of the population (Komorowski, Stanny 2019, p. 763).

I would like to present the evolution of its most important elements, those related to providing households with electricity, water and telephones. This picture will be supplemented with information about the expansion of the road and railway network, which illustrates the possibilities for transporting people and goods.

After the partitions, Poland inherited a very varied density of the railway network: it was well-developed in the Wielkopolska, Pomerania and Silesia regions, and very poorly developed in the eastern part of the country, i.e. east of the River Vistula, and especially in the Eastern Borderland. These differences have largely continued to the present day, although the use of this form of transport has changed over time. New railways were built in the post-war period (see Fig. 25), up to 1980. After that, and especially after 1990, the rail network

²²⁹ It is a widespread opinion that changes in the agrarian structure were blocked by two laws passed in 2016: the 14 April law on halting the sale of land from state-owned resources and the 6 July law on the agrarian system (consolidated text of 14 November). Amendments to this law in 2019 were merely cosmetic.

²³⁰ <https://encyklopedia.pwn.pl/haslo/cywilizacja;3888917.html>, retrieved 14 March 2020.

shrank as road transport became popular. The devastation of the rail network was even noted in many regions; this is happening in Western Pomerania, for instance. In many cases, the network is very seldom used, or even not at all. Whereas there was 8.4 km of operational rail track per 100 sq. km in 1950, in 2015 the figure was just 6.2 km per 100 sq. km.

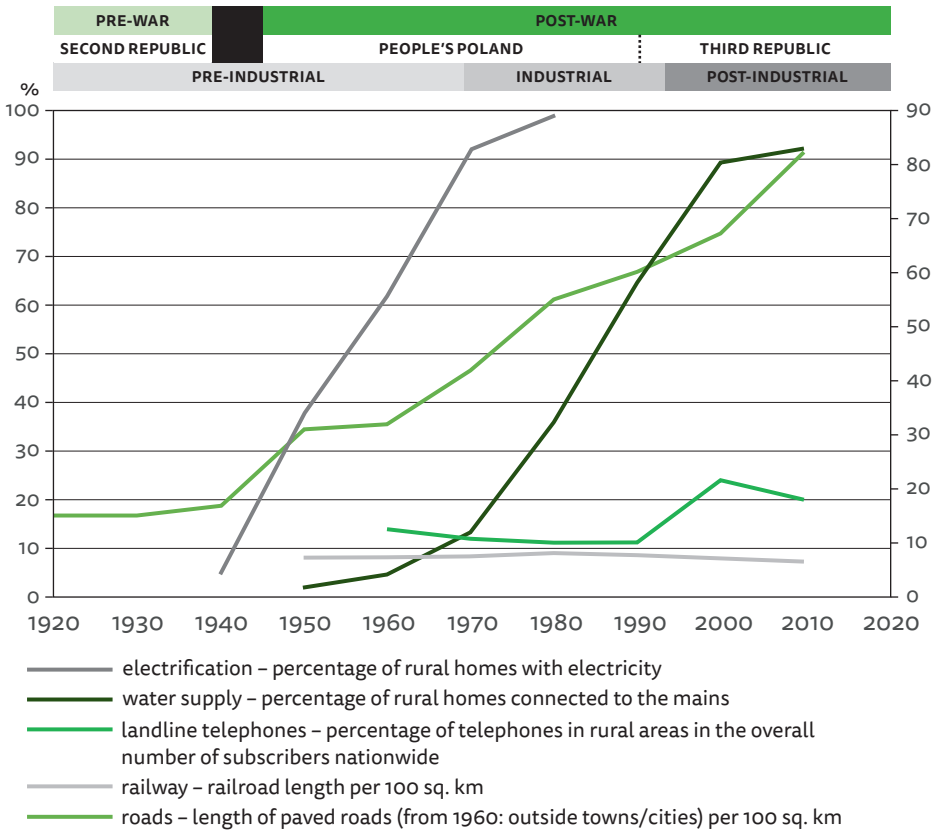


Figure 25.

Evolution of elements of the material infrastructure 1920–2010

Source: own work based on: Komorowski, Stanny 2019; GUS 2018.

Road transport has been growing in popularity, especially since the road network has been developing and road quality improving. The construction of motorways and expressways began in the 1970s, and its pace picked up noticeably after 1990. At the end of the second decade of the 21st century Poland had over 4,000 kilometres of motorways and expressways. Road

transport has improved significantly, though there are still villages (about 1,500, i.e. almost 4%) without a paved road (Stanny, Rosner, Komorowski 2018). Road transport has become widespread; its character changed at the turn of the century, from public coach transport to private cars. This change was forced by the (self-)elimination of a large part of the public bus services, which were replaced by individual and collective private transport. From the 1990s, the number of passenger cars in rural areas, mainly second-hand ones, increased rapidly; their number per 1,000 residents is higher than in urban areas.

Electricity supply in the countryside, i.e. the electrification of rural areas, deserves special attention. The history of electrification unfolded in People's Poland and is one of its founding myths.²³¹ It was mainly cities that were electrified in the inter-war period, while only about 5% of rural localities had access to electricity. Immediately after the war, as a result of territorial changes, about 30% of villages had electricity, mainly in the western part of the country.

A breakthrough in the history of electricity was brought by the 1950 law on the universal electrification of villages and housing estates, which obliged residents to get connected to the newly built grid ... This universality consisted, among other things, in involving rural residents in the process: they were obliged to prepare paid quarters for the workers and space to store equipment and materials, and their own help with the work was paid for. Current costs of electrification were covered from the state budget, and then part of this was recovered in instalment payments ... depending on household income and the scope of work. The fees usually did not exceed 10% of a household's annual income and enabled almost 70% of the cost borne by the state for this purpose to have been recovered by the late 1950s (Komorowski, Stanny 2019, p. 769).

Rural areas were fully electrified by 1980. The water supply for rural areas was also marked by history, this time the history of resistance to socialism. Let us trace it from the beginning. The main form of water supply in the inter-war period was from wells, either individual or collective. Individual wells were not very widespread because they were expensive to build in geologically tough

²³¹ It was expressed in the slogan "socialism is people's power plus electricity", which was a copy of the Leninist slogan "socialism is Soviet power plus electricity". It was also reflected in painting: in Moscow I saw a painting by Alexander Gerasimov portraying Joseph Stalin in a white uniform against a backdrop of wheat fields and power pylons; in the late 1980s I saw a similar picture in a museum in socialist Romania, where Dacian treasures were displayed in the basement while the remaining floors presented exhibits related to Nicolae Ceaușescu, including a painting in which he, too, was standing dressed in white in front of a wheat field, pylons and factory chimneys.

areas. For many years after World War II, having a well on the farm did not mean access to good water, as many wells only reached down to subsoil water. Drawing water was hard work, especially on farms that bred animals and did not have a horse to help; this work was often performed by women. During this period there were three systems for supplying water to rural households: “1) individual (local wells and pipelines), 2) company-based (connected with business activity),²³² and 3) collective (water pipeline networks under public management)” (Komorowski, Stanny 2019, p. 775). If we consider the first and third types together, then less than 5% of rural homes had access to running water in 1960. In the mid-1960s a government decision²³³ created possibilities to construct rural water pipelines, but this did not win rural residents’ widespread approval due to fear of the costs. “The decision to build these systems was taken by local state bodies upon a motion from at least half of the owners of real estate located in a given locality. In many cases, despite a pipeline having been built, wells remained the main source of water for households” (ibid., p. 777). In 1970, 14% of households had access to mains water supply, though two-thirds of them drew water from their own wells, which means these were local (homestead) pipelines. A significant increase in this infrastructure occurred over the next two decades, when the share of rural households connected to mains water grew to 64%. A new path to installing pipelines in rural areas appeared in the 1980s: after a several-year battle, the Foundation for Supplying Rural Poland with Water was allowed to register as a legal entity. It was established using Western funding²³⁴ to support such projects, first in the form of non-repayable subsidies and then, after 1990, in the form of low-interest loans. Starting in the same year, initiatives to build mains water systems were undertaken by the newly formed local self-governments (the *gmina*/commune level), which took advantage of other funding starting from the late 1990s: the pre-accession SAPARD programme and then EU funding after 2004. In 2002, 3.4 million rural homes (89%) had running water, and in 2015 there were only 173 communes (8% of rural and urban-rural communes) where the proportion of homes with mains water was less than 80%.

²³² State farms are an example.

²³³ The 1965 law on providing agriculture and rural areas with water.

²³⁴ The foundation’s operations were financed by the governments of Germany, the United States, Canada and Norway. The funding appeared in 1981 and was managed by the Polish Episcopate of the Catholic Church. Efforts to work out a formula for utilising the funds failed at the time. After long and laborious negotiations with the communist authorities, the foundation was registered in 1987 and entrusted to the episcopate’s supervision. The democratic opposition viewed this event in terms of a victory scored over the authorities.

If we were to seek regularities in the popularisation of elements of the technical infrastructure in rural Poland, in many cases (electricity, water supply, sewerage) we might speak of convergence, i.e. rural areas becoming similar to urban areas. The spread of telephones was slightly different, as landline phones were non-existent or rare in rural areas up to the 1990s. When they became available, rural residents stopped applying for them in favour of new-generation options: mobile phones and the Internet. A (temporary) increase in landlines in urban and rural areas can be observed in the decade between 1990 and 2000, the effect of the de-monopolisation of the telecommunications market, among other factors. New telecommunications hardware (lines, switchboards) was built as part of local projects as well. The number of rural landline subscribers reached its peak in 2002, at 2.8 million, which was about a quarter of the subscribers nationwide. These numbers started to decrease in 2003 (to about a fifth of the national figure), while the number of mobile phones increased. Rural areas acquired mobile phones relatively quickly, at a pace similar to urban areas, catching up with cities/towns in 2015 (94% of households compared to 96% in urban areas). The Internet spread at a slightly slower but still impressive pace: in the same year, it was present in over 80% of rural households, which was the same as in urban areas (Komorowski, Stanny 2019).

Characterising – necessarily very briefly – the saturation of rural areas with elements of technical infrastructure, I have left out one very important aspect: spatial diversity. Throughout the century in question, there were noticeable differences between the western and eastern regions of the country. In the inter-war period, the Wielkopolska, Pomerania and Silesia regions were significantly better equipped with all the elements except landline telephones. Things were worst in the provinces of the Eastern Borderland. This was the effect of the partitions, different levels of the partitioning powers' economic development, the less or more peripheral status of Polish lands etc. The subsequent territorial changes, i.e. the loss of eastern lands and the border being shifted towards the more "civilised" west, preserved and even exacerbated those differences. The dividing line between the relatively well-equipped western part ("Poland A") and the poorly developed eastern part ("Poland B") ran along the former partition lines. These differences, which still exist, have gradually diminished, with evening-out progressing the fastest in the Third Republic. This was also when other differences became visible: between suburban and peripheral areas. "Metropolitan zones" and "problem zones" were distinguished in the second decade of the 21st century, the changes in them proceeding differently (more in: Rosner, Stanny 2017).

The processes of “civilising” space described above were controlled processes, even if they included elements of spontaneous activity. National-level or local decision-making centres implemented programmes aimed at achieving certain goals, overt and/or hidden. This assumed various forms, depending not just on financial and technical capacity, but also on the involvement of “rural society” in different stages of the process: vision, strategy, plan/programme of action, or not until the implementation stage. There were some interesting spontaneous or quasi-spontaneous initiatives by rural residents to launch projects in their village or declaring support for them. The inter-war period saw some initiatives to build village schools, while People’s Poland was a time of very popular “community actions”, which Wierzbicki (1973) counted among manifestations of conscious, voluntary participation in activities benefitting the local community and of its self-organisation.²³⁵

Significant changes in the rural technical infrastructure (Fig. 25) occurred at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries. They not only enabled economic processes to intensify, but also noticeably improved rural residents’ standard of living. Additionally, each such change caused a degree of excitement among inhabitants, which is impossible to see in any figures, dates or indices, but is reflected in many of the copiously published memoirs and in the “rural trend” of literature (Redliński, Myśliwski).

Even though several dozen years have passed since I left my family home in a village near Kraków, I remember all those important events: my grandmother’s delight at the quality water in the well, my mother reading books by a paraffin lamp, the admiration for the electricians team installing the power system and my parents’ expedition to Kraków to buy lamps and a chandelier (which neighbours came specially to see), the wind-up telephone with the number “49”, which appeared in the late 1960s (the switchboard could accommodate 50 numbers; the same two end digits, preceded by many other numerals, are still part of the phone number today). After moving to Warsaw, I witnessed the homestead water pipe and central heating being installed in 1976, the asphalt road appearing in the mid-1980s and, finally, the telephone being connected to an automatic exchange in the second half of the 1990s, enabling calls to be made to anywhere in the world. Today when I cannot get through to the landline, I call my brother or sister-in-law “on their mobile” and consult my writings about rural Poland with them over the Internet.

²³⁵ It was the (Polish) exemplification of his concept of Local Community Activisation and Development (AiRSL).

3.4. Changes in settlement structures

The Second Republic covered territories that had belonged to the three partitioning powers for over 100 years; they did not just differ in the level of economic development, but “there were different legal-administrative and ownership conditions in each of them, the differences in the spatial organisation of settlements in different parts of the country being visible at first glance” (Figlus 2019, p. 709). In fact, they are still visible today.

A generalised picture of the diversity of types of village planning in Poland within its inter-war borders was captured accurately in research by Bogdan Zaborski (1926). In Pomerania and Wielkopolska (the former Prussian partition), villages with a medieval origin still accounted for a large proportion, including *ulicówka*- and *owalnica*-type settlements. In foothill areas along the Carpathian arc, *łańcuchówka*-type settlements were predominant; gradually expanding *widlica*- and *wielodroźnica*-type settlements dominated in southern Małopolska. The Podlasie region featured mostly *szeregówka*-type settlements shaped as far back as the 16th century. A large part of Mazovia and Polesie featured hamlets and solitary villages, whose development had been determined by physio-geographic factors (marshes or wildernesses) and a unique ownership structure. In the former Kingdom of Poland, the most important group comprised post-regulation *rzędówka*-type settlements, with some villages of dense development (*ulicówka* and *owalnica* settlements) as well as regular Prussian and Hollander colonies (Figlus 2019, p. 711).

As sociopsychological studies show, this kind of organisation of space affects the way people communicate and influences social contacts.²³⁶

Manor-farm complexes, which included the manor, the farm and the farm housing settlement, were an important part of the settlement structure in the Second Republic. There were at least 20,000²³⁷ such settlement structures, mostly separated from peasant villages. The agricultural reforms led to the emergence of new, more loosely built-up forms connecting settlements with their field layout as well as 3,900 new post-parcellation colonies (called “*poniatówka*”)²³⁸ with a scattered settlement structure. World War II interrupted the transformation of rural areas’ agrarian and spatial structures. The

²³⁶ Studies on communication structure have proven that different models of these structures (circle, chain and star) affect the speed and accuracy of information transfer as well as the satisfaction level, the leader’s role and the way the group is organised (Szacka 2003, p. 191).

²³⁷ There were 19,454 farms of over 50 ha in 1921, and 17,639 in 1939 (GUS 2012, p. 335).

²³⁸ From the name of Juliusz Poniatowski, the minister of agriculture at the time.

Most often imposed by the political situation, changing the place of residence of sometimes entire local communities contributed to the noticeable transformation of the settlement network ... As a result of depopulation, villages in many areas disappeared partially or completely, whereas a substantial concentration of the population took place in others, resulting in the spatial development of existing settlements (Figlus, p. 718).

However, a few dozen years had to pass before people who had been repatriated from beyond the River Bug felt at home and accepted someone else's legacy, rebuilding degraded buildings or referencing the regional half-timbered architecture in newly erected ones. A different kind of change was brought by the post-war nationalisation of land and its (partial) distribution among peasants. Landed-estate owners disappeared from the rural landscape,²³⁹ as did manor-farm settlements, while manor and palace complexes were turned into headquarters of various institutions. Many if not most of them were destroyed (as a result of poor management), many fell into ruin. The recipients of the land distributed under the agricultural reform did not start building on this land until the mid-1960s, i.e. two decades after the reform. Other interventions in the spatial structure of rural areas occurred in terrain occupied by state and cooperative farms, which were able to shape the structure of their field layout, including through forced exchanges with peasants.²⁴⁰ A different settlement structure was developed in this case. The state farms were based on previously existing manor-farm complexes; during their expansion, they were developed into complexes with three functional zones: a residential zone, a production/farming zone and a zone for administration, services and employee amenities. This type of settlement structure was found mostly in the Northern and Western Territories, where the majority of these farms were located.

The appearance of the settlement landscape in rural Poland changed significantly after World War II as a result of the development of industry and transport. A process in which the original rural layouts were erased took place, and as a result of rapid development many settlements gained a surface form that was rural-urban in character. This is true especially of suburban villages, which became strongly urbanised (ibid. 2019, p. 724).

²³⁹ They were forbidden to settle in the *powiat*/county where their former estate lay.

²⁴⁰ The 1949 decree on the exchange of land and the 1968 law on the joining and exchange of land.

Peripheral villages retained their previous shape; they became rather reminiscent of open-air museums as they depopulated, and this process accelerated noticeably starting from the 1990s.

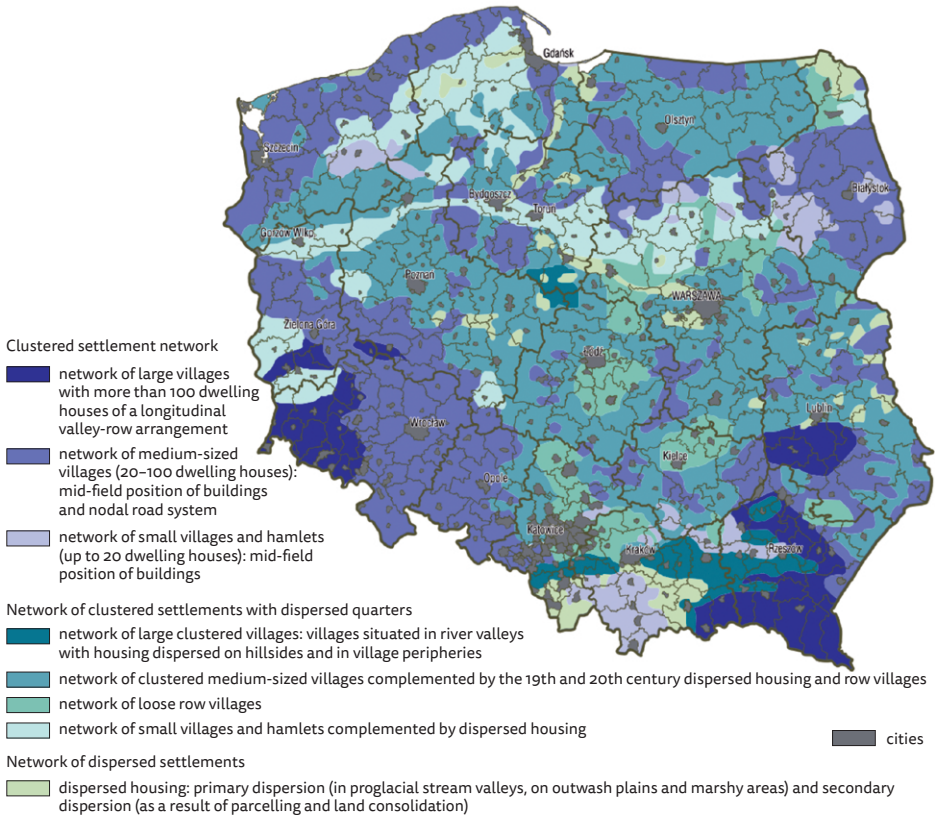


Figure 27.
Types of rural settlement networks in Poland after World War II

Source: Kielczewska-Zaleska 1965.

The rural settlement network was shaped according to the three-part model based on function (production, housing, communal services and facilities). This approach distinguished between small, basic villages with welfare and service centres, and large, major villages with a well-developed range of services as well as cultural, educational and administrative institutions. After the administrative reform of 1973, villages that were *gmina*/commune capitals became such major centres.

In terms of size, the rural spatial structure [Fig. 27] obviously reflects historical political divisions. The biggest villages (population over 1,000) are concentrated within the former Galicia region (where there is still agrarian overpopulation today). The distribution of large and medium-sized villages (populations between 500 and 1,000 and between 200 and 500) is quite even across the whole country. Small villages (population between 100 and 200) are correlated with the reach of the former Kingdom of Poland, where very small villages (population under 100) mainly occur in Podlasie and northern and western Mazovia, the reason being physio-geographic factors (large forest complexes) or the historical ownership structure (ibid. 2019, p. 728).

The period of the Third Republic was characterised by a multitude of changes, which – although planned – have progressed spontaneously. The first group comprises the effects of changes in agriculture. The privatisation of state farms had relatively little impact on changes in the structure of family farms. Former state-farm land was incorporated into large-scale private farms that were based on acquired and rented land; the state continues to own almost half of the former state-farm land. These farm businesses have continued to change in form and area the whole time, also as a result of changing government policies. Enormous changes have taken place in former state-farm housing estates, which in most cases turned into enclaves of structural unemployment after losing their production functions and many social and welfare services as a result of reduced employment on private farms. Their technical degradation is also noticeable. The family-farm polarisation process outlined in the previous section is deeper than the statistics show. Many plots are not used for farming and have turned into wasteland; short-term tenant use is widespread, fossilising the existing structure and blocking the development of vibrant and long-lasting farms.²⁴¹ The deagrarianisation of rural areas is widely observed, as indicated by the shrinking arable land (Fig. 23): a decreasing amount of this land is purely agricultural, and a growing amount is of a mixed character due to multifunctionality. The marginalisation or even disappearance of agricultural functions has progressed rapidly not only in suburban spaces but also in tourist areas. “The progressive deagrarianisation of space brings effects such as the decomposition of homesteads, the vanishing of traditional rural developments in favour of standard single-family housing

²⁴¹ The reason behind this is often that payments are used contrary to the legal regulations. The payments should go to producers. In this spontaneously developed tenancy system, the land users do not pay rent, but thanks to their crops the land fulfils the requirement of being utilised agricultural area, which gives the land's owners the right to receive direct payments.

devoid of any agricultural production function" (ibid., p. 731). Not only are rural areas becoming more densely built-up, which is changing their character, but new structures are also being formed along main roads and tracks. Scattered developments are being built, and there is also a new trend to build settlements within the field layout and far from the original settlements; these are mainly being built in suburban areas. Rural space is still being managed wastefully, the responsibility for this lying with local governments, which act "in accordance with" the letter of the law. Another type of change was brought about by EU funding for rural development, which Poland started receiving in 2005. This funding supported reconstruction and revitalisation projects in rural areas, also some that affected their material substance. Some of these projects have radically changed village centres, not always respecting their historically shaped character.

Enormous transformations took place in rural settlement in Poland in the century between 1918 and 2018. During this period, the factors involved were not just economic, social and cultural, but also included territorial changes seldom seen elsewhere, which resulted in changes to the "historical substrate". Political changes also had a huge impact, because as Nina Assorodobraj (1963) pointed out, each political order wrote history anew in order to legitimise itself. The events highlighted in such writing of history were important, but so were the events that were ignored, blurred and erased. Poland's rebirth after 1918 also required this kind of erasure; the Orthodox church in Warsaw being pulled down is one example. How many such minor post-partition structures were eliminated from local spaces? Similar erasure from space was conducted after 1944. Manor houses were systematically and spontaneously destroyed, woodland overgrew forgotten Jewish cemeteries as well as German ones in the Recovered Territories. After 1989 this process included Soviet soldiers' monuments and cemeteries, although Stalin's gift, i.e. the Palace of Culture and Science in Warsaw, still stands. Such erasure of traces also took place during changes in the agrarian structure. Compared to other Central European countries, it was limited in Poland. No one in Czechoslovakia or Hungary even tried to separate out the peasant fields which had once been merged into production cooperatives, but protected the existing production structures from disintegration. Reprivatisation procedures offered members (or their heirs) variously calculated shares in the assets of the former collective farms, which were recouped only in small part in the form of land, but without disturbing the agricultural structure of the large-scale cooperative farm (Halamska 1998; Maurel 1994).

4. Polish people's issues with (their own) rurality

As a result of the changes that have occurred in post-industrial society, rurality and the countryside have become a common good, as Philippe Lacombe remarked at the turn of the century, i.e. a good “whose consumption by some does not preclude consumption by others; there is no rivalry involved”. However, this creates a new situation, because:

if the countryside is a social living environment supplying public goods, it is subject to contemplation and admiration; but becoming a public good it is also subject to social control. Then we can speak of a dual perception: admiration and the pleasure of consuming the countryside, but also a perception that controls the production of those public goods that might run out if we are inattentive (Lacombe 2001, p. 24, English based on the Polish translation by M.H.).

How do we synthetically describe Polish people's attitude to (their own) rurality? The introduction to *L'agriculture moderne* by Servolin (1989), a work already cited in Chapter 2, begins with the words: “France is a great agricultural country. Each and every one of us knows this. It is part of our national myth”. Following this path, I want to consider how the Polish countryside and agriculture are embedded in the Polish national myth. One such myth, which has been debunked by Jan Sowa (2011), is the myth of Poland as the granary of Europe, which also served to legitimise the manor- and serfdom-based economy with all its social consequences. But we can look at this from another viewpoint: the fact of the existence of the manor- and serfdom-based economy “introduced” Poland into the world literature; I mainly refer to the analyses by Witold Kula (1983) and Immanuel Wallerstein (1974), who presented this economy's influence on the formation of the capitalist system/world, from different viewpoints. Kula analysed the Polish economy's progressive economic backwardness compared to the developing centre in the west of Europe, while Wallerstein showed the Polish economy's role in the development of the global capitalist economy, since the Western European centre had to have its peripheries.

The Polish social imaginary related to the countryside is extremely complex, which is the result of history and Polish people's attitude towards it. It has also been very strongly influenced by literature, the arts and currently also film, which all feed the mass imagination (Sulima 2020). On the one hand, we have – idyllic or realistic – narratives about life in rural manor houses

large and small, and narratives about the peasant countryside on the other. That is the first division. Then there is the division of the peasant village narratives: in some, the peasant “feeds and defends” and “is mighty, and that’s that”, while in others he is “the churl who had the golden horn”. Following Katarzyna Chmielewska (2020), we might speak of narrative conflicts, since the narratives can be: emancipatory when rurality is a liability and a hindrance to social advancement; nostalgic when “the countryside becomes a mythical form bathed in the light of the full moon, usually placed in an indefinite and unreal time; stigmatising by being associated primarily with negative qualities (post-serfdom subservience and its extension in *Homo sovieticus*)” (Chmielewska 2020). These conflicting narratives appear with some regularity. The latest, very animated exchange is taking place in the 21st century. Zygmunt Ziątek points to a certain paradox: a heated discussion calling for “the universal rejection of being ashamed of the peasant origins of today’s society” is coupled “with the progressive unification of Polish people’s idea of themselves as a society of democratised post-gentry traditions that – after the collapse of People’s Poland – has virtually no other identities to choose from” (Ziątek 2020).

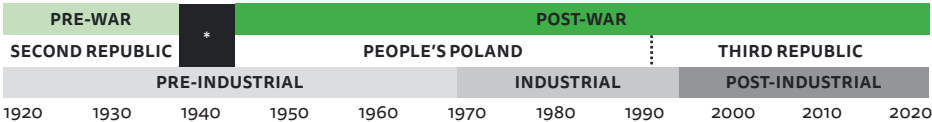
That is why invoking rurality and the countryside, even treated as a public good, is still an ambivalent proposal.

CONCLUSION: TIME, CHANGES, CONTINUITY IN THE EUROPEAN PERIPHERIES

In Poland... meaning where?

1. Social time(s)

The present monograph, which often references studies produced in an interdisciplinary research project, has had a fundamental objective: to show how the importance of rural areas changed in the 100-year history of reborn Poland. This has meant adopting the “systemic” assumption that “the countryside” is a subsystem of a greater whole, namely “Polish society”, and that this subsystem played a crucial role in society’s development. However, it also means that rural areas and all the elements making up their system are subject to the influence of the higher system, i.e. society and its political form – the state. This theoretical construct enabled the continuity of the analysis to be maintained despite the variability of the “material substrates”: changes in the territorial and political forms of the state. These changes were major enough to be considered vital dividing lines on the timeline: for territorial changes it is the World War II period, while political systems divide time into the periods of the Second Republic of Poland, communist People’s Poland, and the Third Republic of Poland. All the events analysed occurred at different stages in the level of social development: pre-industrial, industrial and post-industrial. Transposed onto a linear timeline, these divisions define the social time of events and processes. Such a multiplicity of social times has been very aptly approached by Michel Foucault (2000, p. 111), who wrote that “history is not one duration, but a multiplicity of durations which interlink, and envelop each other, and therefore the old notion of time should be replaced with the notion of multiplied duration”.²⁴²



* World War II

Figure 28.
Social time axis: the main dividing lines

Source: own work.

²⁴² I would like to thank Prof. Roch Sulima for pointing out this reference for me.

The analysis of the continuity and change of the rural subsystem was also produced at a specific point on this timeline: the third decade of the Third Republic, in a country entering the post-industrial stage of social development and having had a fixed territory for over 70 years. The researchers were therefore given a specific 100-year perspective, and were able to qualify the importance of events on the basis of historical sources. Nowadays, even factors as typical of and distinctive for this part of Europe as feudalism and the second serfdom (or neo-serfdom) are being studied anew, and the impact of other, internal sources of their emergence is being suggested (Kowalewski 2014). On top of this, there is a subjective factor involved, though one related to social time, namely the researchers' age: each person has lived through a different section of social time, which often affects the perception of events and the evaluation of their role. Many of the researchers also displayed a peculiar syndrome that one might call "lengthening of the historical perspective": forgetting that the Third Republic spans a third of the century and that each of its "yesterdays" is already history, trivialising the significance of changes during the People's Poland period and giving inflated importance to the Second Republic (embellishing its image). Meanwhile, as systematic analyses of many social processes have shown, this particular period was a "heated time of change": it began and ended with social revolutions, it was when the transition from the pre-industrial to the industrial phase occurred, and when the foundation for the post-industrial phase was built.²⁴³

However, I would like to draw attention to another time as well, i.e. the time of the analysis, which spanned the years 2018 and 2019. Though it was just a few months from 2020, when the present volume is being produced, it is already a different time now, because the previous cumulative processes of change are hanging in the balance as a result of the coronavirus pandemic. We do not know if this will lead to fundamental changes in global processes or only cause a correction, or if it will only mean a short-term disruption.

2. Change and continuity

This 100-year period in the history of rural Poland has revealed the ubiquity of social changes, as if change were "the only commonly existing fact that is

²⁴³ The "Polish" divides on the timeline only partially correspond to those in the other Visegrád Group countries. The axis of territorial time is different, especially in the case of Czechia and Slovakia. The transitions between stages of socio-economic development occurred in different times, particularly in the case of Czechia, because Czech society was already an industrial society in the inter-war period.

present in the essence of what is real" (Whitehead 1988, cited in: Sztompka 2005, p. 24). We might therefore treat the "continuity of change" as one of the manifestations of the continuity which stems from a processual, dynamic vision of society and the process of its continual becoming. The common existence of changes implies their enormous diversity, the occurrence of many types of change at different levels of the organisation of social life, and the existence of many combinations of links between their processes. This multiplicity breeds the temptation to organise them, as the changes described constitute outright textbook examples (cf. Sztompka 2005).

A series of processes of change occurred on all the traditionally distinguished levels of social reality: macro, mezzo and micro. Two kinds of macroprocess can be differentiated: adaptive processes initiated by sudden changes in society, and processes progressing in all of society, in which rural areas took part according to their own rhythm. An example of the former type would be territorial changes, which triggered a series of migrations followed by complex processes of the migrants' adaptation to new conditions. The political revolutions of 1944 and 1989 are another example; they changed the rules of how the macrosystem functioned, and the "countryside" subsystem had to adjust to the new rules or even form a new place for itself. In every political period, this "formation" is mainly noticeable in the contestatory behaviours of peasants and farmers. We can easily find elements of morphogenesis in them, since the various solutions that emerged as a result were innovative. Demographic changes are one example of the other type of macroprocesses, and are manifested in the phenomenon of demographic transition. These changes are unique on the mezzo level (this uniqueness has been omitted from the present study), but their link to the micro level, in families and rural communities, is very prominent. Changes in the fertility rate, i.e. growth followed by a systematic decrease, resulted in multiple changes in the network of rural schools, which were multifunctional institutions in many local communities. Another example of a macroprocess in which the countryside has a distinctive involvement is the process of literacy-teaching, schooling and professionalisation, which changes the social and occupational structure of rural areas. The mutual correlation of the macro and micro levels is a special feature of this kind of process.

A substantial group of processes was situated within the mezzo level. In our research, these were changes in the rural economy, chiefly in agriculture. Changes within the agricultural subsystem were the most distinctive changes in the countryside, and the shrinking role of agriculture earned them the name

“deagrarianisation of rural areas”, a process that has different aspects and corresponding indicators. On the other hand, a gradual process of incorporating agricultural, mainly family farming, into the national economic circulation took place throughout the century in question. This incorporation was manifested in the laborious process of building institutions and mechanisms for integrating agriculture with the economy described in Chapter 2. Furthermore, there was a whole range of processes that changed the internal structure and dynamic of agriculture: increasing intensity and productivity, decreasing employment, changes in the agrarian structure etc. As regards agrarian structural changes, there was a long-lasting large proportion of small farms, which preserved their form, but their function changed fundamentally and today they have become ballast (not very heavy so far) for rural families. The processes at the mezzo level also have to be seen to include changes in rural space, though such processes unfold on all the levels. As an example, the concentration of the population in areas surrounding towns and cities leads to the depopulation of peripheral areas. This process disrupts the balance at the macro level, leading to the restructuring of the whole system, i.e. Polish society. It is similar with changes in rural building development: rapid transformations have been dictated by rural residents’ changing tastes, but they also destroy cultural elements that, according to the concept of rurality and the countryside as a public good, do not belong to a given village or rural area alone. The process of building rural infrastructure is also subject to the restrictions and demands of the macrosystem.

The wide range of processes of change is also reflected in their analysis in terms of form. Descriptions of the countryside have always underlined the cyclical character of its life, the result of close ties to nature. This recurrent cycle still exists, mainly in agriculture and among the population with a connection to farming, but compared to the past its importance is limited, as most rural residents work outside agriculture, where the rhythm of work is not determined by the seasons of the year. In addition, cultural changes have almost completely eradicated seasonal rituals, and the seasons no longer determine the amount of free time and how it is utilised. Most of the processes described in the monograph are directional processes (which one could treat as a multilinear process of change in rural Poland, proceeding along many trajectories). Some of these changes were teleological and, in accordance with convergence theory, they have headed towards a certain level that is shared by developed societies. Such processes include the changing demographic structure, which has attained that level; the changing social structure, which over the past 30 years has rapidly been approaching the rural social

structure of developed countries, which is dominated by workers; deagrarianisation in its economic and social aspect, and farming productivity. The past 30 years have also seen processes adapting agriculture to the requirements of the Common Agricultural Policy. In this bundle of processes, it is very interesting to note those which, having reached a certain maximal level, have ended (electrification of rural areas), slowed down noticeably (the spread of mains water supply), or been cut short due to the appearance of new technologies (landline vs. mobile phones). Particularly interesting processes seem to be those in which a certain maximum was achieved, then followed by a turning point, after which they changed into their own opposite, as was the case with peasantisation vs. depeasantisation and, less obviously, the institutionalisation of rural communities and their deinstitutionalisation.

Trying to “organise” the processes of change in this way, we must not ignore their consequences; we need to consider the end result, including modified reproduction (usually quantitative) and transformation, which is a qualitative change. This is a fundamental question in studies on social change. If we look at individual processes of change, most of them are modifications involving expansion/increase or contraction/decrease. Descriptions of the processes confirm this: they speak of a drop in employment in agriculture, growth of productivity, a decrease in the proportion of farmers in the occupational structure, an increase in people with tertiary education etc. Most of them only seem to modify a given segment of social reality. Things look different when we trace the processes in certain bundles, which often lends them a new significance in the process of change as a whole. When just one indicator is analysed, changes in natural population growth show its progress, regression or stagnation, but analyses of several elements (births, deaths, life expectancy, fertility and child-bearing age) help indicate fundamental changes in the structure of the phenomenon of natural population growth. This is a qualitative change that demographers call demographic transition. It is the same with the countryside’s social structure: tracing the proportion of individual social-occupational groups, we only see its linear increase or decrease; however, these changes in particular groups lead to changes in the proportions of the structure, i.e. to its transformation. Looking at processes of change in all areas of social life in the countryside from a 100-year perspective, not only in the ones analysed here, we can observe qualitative changes significant enough to warrant the adoption of a different, new definition of rural areas and rurality in the social sciences.

The above analysis only partly answers the question of continuity, which is not the opposite of change; that would be duration. Asking about continuity means asking which of the elements of the system we have called the countryside have preserved their identity, i.e. their typical features and the organisation of those features, determining the distinctness of a given phenomenon thanks to which it is socially identified. One example might be the changes in peasant culture, which underwent complete destruction in the period under consideration. The stages and manifestations of this gradual disintegration have been discussed extensively. For me, one inalienable element of this culture was the valorisation of bread, involving not only the nutritional value of this food, which was often in short supply in the past, but also respect for the peasants' hard work and the mystery of nature surrendering to their efforts. That is why I found it rather unsettling in the 1980s when small-time farmers bought out bread from the shops to feed it to small livestock because it was "profitable" at a time of meat shortages. Even more disturbing cases are described in the memoirs published in *Sto lat mojego gospodarstwa* [A Hundred Years of My Farm], i.e. using grain as fuel to heat homes, which allegedly was economically justified.

3. The "social configuration of agriculture" in Poland's 100-year history

The primary objective in undertaking the project, as dictated by the circumstances, was to show how and to what extent rural areas and agriculture influenced the character of the Second Republic of Poland, People's Poland and the Third Republic of Poland. The key to this was a broad understanding of agriculture, not just as a sector of the economy but as a multidimensional structure that, citing Piotr Sztompka (2003), we might call "the cultural configuration of agriculture".²⁴⁴ In each of the above political orders, this socio-cultural configuration of agriculture had a different share in and impact on the entirety of social life; it fulfilled overt and hidden economic, social and cultural functions. Nor can we forget that, as early as the 16th century, agriculture, or rather the determination of its place by economic and social policy, already decided not only Poland's fate but the fate of the whole re-

²⁴⁴ I use this notion figuratively, approaching agriculture as a broad concept involving not only land cultivation and animal husbandry. In this I follow the notion of cultural configuration that Sztompka (2003, p. 254) defines as a set of varied cultural elements focused around a single object, idea or value (e.g. automobile culture, scientific civilisation, consumer culture).

gion we call Central Europe. A synthesis of this was presented by Immanuel Wallerstein (1974). Regardless of the external and internal reasons identified for the manorial economy's emergence and development, its expansion delayed the development of the capitalist economy and consolidated the traditional agrarian structure, creating the foundation for a dual agricultural structure. The development of the manorial economy in the 16th and 17th centuries additionally thrust Poland to the peripheries of the emerging global system and caused its political peripheralisation, which resulted in the partitions:

The process of pushing these regions²⁴⁵ to the peripheries occurred on many levels. The dynamics and form of this was determined by the social structure, the system of class forces, demographic and geographical factors, and dependence on trade networks stretching around capitalist centres in north-western Europe. Imposing a dependent/peripheral form of capitalist development was thus facilitated by external as well as internal factors (Starnawski, Wielgosz 2007, p. XXV).

In publications on the centenary of revived Polish statehood, the partitions are often indicated as the cause of economic and social backwardness. But even the partitioning itself was a consequence of peripheralisation, while differences in the economic development level of different regions of Poland had already existed before the partitions, though the partitions did compound the existing backwardness (with the exception of Wielkopolska and Pomerania).

The dual structure of agriculture survived the granting of freehold, which the partitioning powers carried out in different periods of the 19th century and along different lines. The Second Republic and People's Poland struggled with this agrarian structure, each effecting (different) agricultural reforms. The Third Republic has also had its input into resolving the problem of the structure's duality. This dual structure of agriculture fulfilled important political functions in each of the above political orders, revealing divisions within the political classes of each period and forcing every group coming into power to take a stance on the matter. Legislation regulating the issue is among the founding documents of the Second Republic (1919 Sejm resolution) and of People's Poland (1944 decree on agricultural reform). In 1990 the Third Republic also already took up the privatisation of the state sector of agriculture, which was relatively small for Central Europe. However, let us trace this

²⁴⁵ Meaning the area between the River Elbe in the west, the Danube in the south and the European part of Russia, which in some concepts (see below) corresponds to the reach of Central and Eastern Europe.

from the beginning. In the Second Republic the dual agrarian structure was the basis of the main social divisions. In pre-industrial Polish society, the attitude to land served as the primary criterion of social diversification: it defined who was a lord, a peasant or a landless farm labourer. These basic segments were conflicted; on the one hand, landless peasants and smallholders (who formed the great majority) wanted the parcellation of the great landed estates, while on the other, farm labourers demanded better working conditions and pay from the lords and wealthy peasants. This means that the "rural classes" were active players on the political scene, contesting the existing social order or influencing it through elections and political parties. The great social protests of this period (the 1920s and 1930s), i.e. farm labourer and peasant strikes, were protests by agricultural groups. The agricultural configuration had an even stronger political impact on the system of People's Poland. Agriculture itself, together with the people working in it, was divided politically into "socialist" and "private" agriculture, where it was immediately obvious which one was "better". This division defined the rules of agricultural policy-making for a long 45 years during which "socialist" agriculture was privileged. The approach to private agriculture was one of "repressive tolerance" (Gorlach 1989), but each new team coming into power "wanted to do something good for peasants, too" (Mendras 1976). In 1944 the as yet not personified new authorities gave the peasants land, in 1956 Władysław Gomułka announced he would not collectivise it, in 1971 Edward Gierek (much loved by peasants) abolished obligatory deliveries and later also introduced elements of welfare policy, in 1983 Wojciech Jaruzelski, having little to offer financially, introduced the constitutional rule of the lasting nature of family farms. The crowning of this beneficence towards peasants came on 1 August 1989, when the last government of People's Poland freed agricultural prices, which had a powerful impact on inflation levels. The political influence of "the cultural configuration of agriculture" on the functioning of Polish society was multifaceted. First of all, the fact that collectivisation was halted meant that the social structure, which was supposed to be "socialist", still included an ideologically alien group²⁴⁶ empowered by the myth of its successful resistance to communism.²⁴⁷ This myth of "the peasants who maintained their land, ownership and faith" survived the whole People's

²⁴⁶ The basis for this alienness, as Jerzy J. Wiatr wrote in 1979, was the private ownership of means of production.

²⁴⁷ There are many hypotheses regarding this, among which the one about peasant resistance appears very often; I find it unconvincing, because peasant resistance was equally strong in other Central European countries but agriculture was successfully collectivised there.

Poland period and was even revived (unsuccessfully) in the 1990s and used as an election slogan.²⁴⁸ It was a tacit argument for the possibility of resistance in other circumstances. As Szczepański (1973) expressed it, the peasants became “moderators of social changes”. Secondly, leaving private agriculture in place required incorporating it into the centrally planned economy, including setting up mechanisms for controlling it. This contact of “the private” with “the socialist” unsealed the system, creating possibilities for many forms of inter-sectoral flow and for corruption of the party-and-state system.²⁴⁹ “Green” (rural) Solidarity did not inspire the countryside and farmers like its “red” sister inspired the working class, but its registration (in 1981) in itself was one of the ideological axes of the existing social conflict. The political importance of this agricultural configuration in the Third Republic was already brought to the fore by two laws passed in 1990: on the system of social insurance for farmers and their families, and on the privatisation of agriculture. It is also worth considering whether the lack of a reprivatisation law in Poland was not influenced by the once abandoned collectivisation, since there were no peasants who had suffered collectivisation, or their heirs, i.e. a sufficiently large pressure group directly interested in reprivatisation.²⁵⁰ It should also be remembered that farmers were the first social group to protest against the market rules of the transformation period’s wild capitalism, and that these protests continued on a regular basis (Foryś 2016). They did not directly shake the foundations of the Republic of Poland, but they did indirectly influence the policies it pursued, because even small rural/farmer parties effectively “moderated” the changes being introduced. The protests exposed the attractiveness of populist slogans, and once it had spread, populism at the end of the second decade of the 21st century was poised to change the social order’s political identity. This susceptibility to populist argumentation already revealed itself in the campaign preceding the EU accession referendum in 2003, when government propaganda concentrated on financial advantages and deliberately omitted the European values of liberal democracy. Actually, it was only the Third Republic that gave rural areas primary political impor-

²⁴⁸ Invoking Starosta (2001), we can count this naïve faith in the role of small-time farmers among the symptoms of Polish peripherality. It could also be interpreted in terms of Polish people’s inclination for creating myths and confabulation, which has been raised by many authors (Lewandowski 2007; Podgórecki 1995).

²⁴⁹ I have intentionally used the term from that period, blurring the difference between the prerogatives of the state and the communist party.

²⁵⁰ Such groups existed in other former “people’s democracies”: in Czechoslovakia, Romania and Hungary (cf. Maurel 1994; Halamska 1998).

tance, which boiled down to the slogan: you cannot win elections (and thus build the social order) without the support of rural areas.

The economic impact of agriculture and its environment on Poland's condition has been described and analysed extensively. Here, though only ostensibly, it is much easier than in other cases to show its importance with the help of synthetic indicators: agriculture's share in the gross domestic product (GDP) and its share in employment. Measured by such indicators, this share clearly shows a downward trend: agriculture produced 33% of GDP in 1937 and 3% in 2018, while its share in employment dropped from almost four-fifths in the 1920s to about 10%. Economists confirm that these indicators do not fully reflect the importance of agriculture in the economy, given that its main function is to ensure the country's food security, understood as the level to which society's food needs are satisfied. These needs were not fully satisfied in the Second Republic or in People's Poland; agriculture only ensured full food security for Poland in the Third Republic. Even when domestic food security was not fully assured, food was exported. Small amounts of highly processed foods (e.g. pork – as if invoking the Danish model of development) were exported in the inter-war period. It was similar in People's Poland: the balance of trade in agri-food products was almost always positive. However, agriculture has only experienced an export boom in the Third Republic, when first the association agreement with the EU and then accession opened up not only European labour markets but also agri-food markets, on which Polish producers have secured a good position.²⁵¹ The other economic indicator – employment – also requires some additional interpretation. Agriculture provided employment and a livelihood to a vast number of people over a long period, as there was no other possibility in pre-industrial Poland. This economic "allocation" of the majority of society to agriculture in the Second Republic, and of the majority of the rural population up to the end of People's Poland, also absorbed the mass of "superfluous people" (a few million in the inter-war period, over a million in the People's Poland period). These labour resources, underutilised by the poorly developing economy, were maintained by family farming; in times of crisis, family farms also soaked up any temporarily unused manpower. As recently as the mid-1990s, employment on family farms grew by about 10%: family farming absorbed

²⁵¹ At this point we need to mention forced – in the perspective of integration – anticipatory modernisation. To fulfil the conditions of entering these markets, Polish producers adapted their technologies to the requirements beforehand or within a specified transition period. This mainly applies to the dairy and meat sectors. Moreover, foreign markets forced the acceptance of sanitary and quality criteria as well as pointing to new production opportunities: e.g. ostrich breeding appeared in Poland.

and maintained the unemployed freed by the transforming economy. Family agriculture thus served as a kind of generalised insurance policy (for the state and for employees originating from the countryside). Family farming and the rural population contributed substantially to “socialist industrialisation”, in two ways: by draining peasant farms, and by peasant-labourers’ low wages. This draining complemented the collectivisation of agriculture and manifested itself in high, progressive taxes, a system of obligatory deliveries with official purchase prices, and a lack of welfare benefits for the peasant population up until the 1970s. In this, industrialisation proceeded much more quickly than urbanisation, the latter requiring outlays on consumption-related amenities, which ensured the reproduction of labour power. This was a trend typical of the region’s countries; Ivan Szelényi (1983) called it *underurbanisation*. Once again, a large part of the costs of that reproduction were borne by rural areas through the dual occupation (part-time farming) of their residents, who – having a small farm – accepted very low wages and lived in their own rural dwellings or lived temporarily (often in week-long cycles) in “workers’ hostels”, which enabled savings to be made in spending on consumption-related amenities.²⁵² The spheres of “production” and “consumption” never balanced out, not only in the period of industrialisation but throughout People’s Poland (Szczepański 1973). The situation changed radically in the Third Republic. Agriculture “helped out” the state in the 1990s by limiting unemployment and the costs related to it, but later, especially after EU accession, a huge stream of funding made its way to rural areas. Farmers became a privileged group: from 2003 their income grew much faster than the incomes of other social groups; they were excluded from the general tax system and had their own insurance system, 90% of which was financed from the state budget.

The third aspect in the influence of the “social configuration of agriculture” is socio-cultural. I have already mentioned the political aspect of social divisions in rural areas in the Second Republic, their sources having to be sought in feudalism and the second serfdom. Józef Chałasiński (1938) diagnosed this from a cultural angle, proposing an ideal type of cultural relations between the two main agrarian classes, i.e. “lords/masters” and “peasants”, built on a sense of distinctness and domination on the one hand and submission on the other, containing elements of antagonism but also paternalism/

²⁵² In the early 1970s Marek Muszyński (1973, 1976) tried to estimate the costs of part-time farming, taking into account the costs of housing construction and welfare infrastructure in cities, the costs of commuting, farming effectiveness, the costs of individual housing construction in the countryside, the improvement of the agrarian structure and work output.

clientelism. This model spread across the whole of society and, evolving, has survived to this day in different variants. The young generation of peasants in the inter-war period wanted to achieve socio-cultural independence, in which they were supported by the agrarianism popular at the time, but the paths of social advancement (through education) almost always led to the “lordly” class. This cultural model also contained the model of exercising power, so the political abolition of social classes in 1944 did not shake its foundations. The model of social relations adjusted to the “socialist” reality: managing giant socialist enterprises had a lot in common with running manor farms (Hryniewicz 2004).²⁵³ In People’s Poland the rural lordly class mainly comprised anyone who had any, usually fragmentary, power, thanks to which they had an influence on local residents’ lives. The “party-and-state apparatus” had such competence, but the lords/masters during People’s Poland also included people who did not perform manual labour, i.e. the rural intelligentsia.²⁵⁴ This new “lordly class” of rural intelligentsia and apparatchiks not only reproduced the officially rejected model, but also contributed its own ideas and interpretations to it. The model contained a generalised image of the countryside, stemming from the image of the peasants inhabiting it. The propaganda of the collectivisation period created an exaggerated catalogue of their negative traits, also by decrying the *kulaks* and elevating the *byednyaks* being cared for by the people’s government.

Elements of these social models and ideas were transferred to the Third Republic, and many components of the master-peasant cultural model seeped into authoritarian management styles; Janusz Hryniewicz rightly traced this model back to “manorial culture”,²⁵⁵ outlining its transformation from the 16th century onwards. This culture, originating in the old rural reality, is mainly noticeable in political and public behaviours: the “authorities” of different levels and teams want to be omnipotent rather than “impossibilistic”, while on the other hand “the people” expect the good ruler to surround them with different forms of care; they prefer to “be well governed” than to “participate in governing”. This adds a new dimension to the idea often repeated by Jacek Wasilewski (1986, 2004, 2012), namely that Polish society continues to be a peasant society even though there are no peasants any more.

²⁵³ An anecdote popular in People’s Poland illustrated these relations very aptly on the example of a telephone call a communist party (PZPR) secretary makes to his home. “Comrade housekeeper?”, he asks, then introduces himself: “This is the master speaking”.

²⁵⁴ The gentry code forbade nobles to perform physical labour, with the exception of dangerous jobs like, for example, melting glass.

²⁵⁵ See footnote 2 of the present work.

4. Western universality or peripheral uniqueness?

Geographically speaking, Poland lies in Europe, whose geographical centre is allegedly situated somewhere in the centre of my country. Compared to other continents, Europe is very small and it is not clear where exactly it ends in the east. Things are different when we look at its position in terms of culture; then, Europe presents itself as the core of Western civilisation. How far does it stretch? Some say its reach is the extent of the Baroque in construction or of Western Christianity, resisted by Orthodox Christianity, which is a constitutive element of a different civilisation. The boundary between civilisations runs close to the present eastern border of Poland. Belonging to Europe, Poland occupies a place in the distant peripheries, touching the periphery of the Orthodox civilisation; in the inter-war period part of its territory lay outside the cultural boundaries of Europe. According to Samuel Huntington, it was situated within Europe's (fourth) circle at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries, which actually corresponded to the order in which the European Union was enlarged. Michel Foucher (1993) has offered an interpretation of such a multi-century process of dissemination of civilisational content, from the expansion of Cistercian monasteries in space and time to Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis. This approach has its methodological consequences: it gives grounds for treating changes as a modernisation process that follows the rules of dependent development. Changes occurring at various slower or faster paces make rural Poland increasingly like the rural areas of the civilisational core; "rural Poland is catching up with rural Western Europe" or, to put it differently, a process of convergence occurs. But this explanatory model also has its limitations, aptly expressed by Piotr T. Wandycz, who asks: "Could this model, usually applied in political and socio-economic history, be useful in research on cultural development? ... One could ask: did most of the main trends in European culture have their beginning in the core countries?" (Wandycz 1995, p. 15).

It is also possible to define Poland's place more accurately through a different division of Europe that is relatively recent.²⁵⁶ In the mid-20th

²⁵⁶ Differences in nomenclature aside, Maciej Janowski (2014) points to research of many years' standing on the special case of Central Europe. Among such studies he mentions: "research on the genesis of the manorial-serfdom system and the national movements of the 19th and first half of the 20th century". He also mentions problem fields such as studies on the genesis of nation-states, the problem of confessionalisation, "the emergence and development of the capitalist economy in conditions of backwardness and, finally, successfully developing comparative research on aspects of the history of the Eastern Bloc countries between World War II and 1989" (*ibid.*, p. 20).

century Oskar Halecki (1952) proposed a division of Europe into Western, Central-Western, Central-Eastern and Eastern; based on this division, Poland lay in Central-Eastern Europe. Likewise, taking account of cultural factors, Jenő Szűcs (2015) divided Europe into three parts, eliminating Central-Western Europe as a separate section. Wandycz (1995) followed a similar path in his *Cena wolności* [The Price of Freedom], a history of Central-Eastern Europe, in which he includes Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary, i.e. the countries once forming the Visegrád Triangle (which later became a group of four). In the present work, I had these countries in mind when referring to Central Europe. Dividing Europe in this way, Wandycz notices the existence of zones with different levels of development within it:

These zones influenced one another, where the most developed countries (the core) were a challenge for those lagging behind and stimulated their development ... The links between the zones usually turned out to be of greater advantage to the core, though any possible limitation of the periphery's role to "colonial dependence" intensifying its backwardness was not always an effect of these ties (Wandycz 1995, p. 12).

Thus defined, Central Europe is a region of many contradictions; it is the result of many overlapping processes. It exists in reality according to some, while for others it is only part of the social and political imaginary.²⁵⁷ This is how Norman Davies describes its boundaries:

- geographical divide: North Cape to Cape Matapan;
- Roman *limes*, very similar to the wine line (viticulture);
- Catholic-Orthodox divide, and the Greek Catholic (Uniate) line;
- Ottoman line, very close to the modern limits of Islam;
- 19th-century industrialisation;
- Iron Curtain 1955-1989 (Davies 1998, p. 43).

In *Microcosm* (which he wrote with Moorhouse, 2002), Davies added many other features defining the uniqueness of this region, to mention the influx of many settlers, i.e. peoples of various origins; the major importance of German settlement from the Middle Ages, followed (from the 19th century) by the Slavic nations reclaiming their agency, and the expulsion of Germans after World War II; being the region in Europe where the greatest number of Jews settled, and the experience of the two 20th-century totalitarianisms.

²⁵⁷ This theme is analysed in a very interesting way by Marta Cobel-Tokarska (2013), who considers different geographical approaches, political-cultural ideas and literature, within which she discusses the fashion for Central Europe that was noticeable at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries.

Let us look at the processes of change from this particular perspective.

The fate of Europe “east of the Elbe” was sealed in the 16th century, when “irreversible changes – as Witold Kula (1983) called them – took place in Europe. On the one hand, they involved a lack of change in the east, i.e. the consolidation of the manorial economy with its low efficiency, and on the other a series of rapid “capitalist” changes in north-western Europe, in sectors of the economy (trade, industry) in which labour efficiency was much greater (also in agriculture). Similarly to the position of Latin America, the position of this part of Europe was reduced to that of a colony. This decided its subsequent development, which was influenced by the expansion of capitalism from the West (cf. Kula 1983; Wallerstein 1974).²⁵⁸ The subsequent fate of this part of Europe, which was common in some cases and distinct in others, was defined by the 19th century. Two related phenomena were of key importance in this: the granting of freehold to peasants, and the “inpouring” of the industrial revolution. In different parts of Central Europe, including Poland, these processes occurred in different periods of the long 19th century, always with substantial delay compared to the West.

Nation-states emerged in the region after the Great War; their genealogies were varied depending on the “from nation to state” model.²⁵⁹ All of them had new borders defined at Versailles, varied levels of economic development in the regions/provinces, quite sizable national minorities, an intelligentsia whose status was based on education (Michel 1997), and significant proportions of Jews, rural residents and peasants. They also had unresolved “agrarian issues”. Agricultural reforms, which followed various principles, were undertaken all over the region in the early 1920s and implemented with varied consequences (cf. Roszkowski 1995). This was a period of the depeasantisation of rural Central Europe and of the spreading of the “Danish path” of agricultural development, i.e. agrarianism affecting the mentality of societies and agrarian parties. Different political systems developed in the countries of the region, but there were authoritarian elements, sometimes very strong, in all of them, which was actually true of the whole of Europe at the time. However, the fates of these countries during World War II and its territorial

²⁵⁸ Wallerstein treats the emergence and duration of the manorial-serfdom system in Central and Eastern Europe as an element of the emergence of the global capitalist system. A similar approach to these issues is taken by Henri Stahl in relation to Romania (cf. Janowski 2014).

²⁵⁹ Historians distinguish two paths of arriving at a national state: the state-nation, when the nation is shaped under the influence of a political organisation, i.e. the state, and the nation-state, when a people-nation builds its own state. Poland and Hungary are examples of a mixed path to a national state, while Czechoslovakia represents the latter of the two types mentioned above (cf. Szacka 2003).

consequences were different for each of them; the map of Central Europe changed again.

The next common period in its history was communism between 1944 and 1989. The similarities, as indicated by Grzegorz Ekiert (1996, p. 305), stemmed from the “forced imposition of identical political and economic institutions”, but actual implementation, which we might call “real socialism”, had its “national” variants (cf. Gorlach 2006). This is suggested not only by the structure and dynamics of political crises: 1956 in Hungary, 1968 in Czechoslovakia and 1980 in Poland (Ekiert 1996), but also by the different models of the collectivisation of agriculture (Halamska 1998), which Nigel Swain (2000) has listed as Stalinist collectivisation, neo-Stalinist collectivisation (Czechoslovakia), collectivisation abandoned (Poland) and quasi-market collectivisation (Hungary). The model implemented determined the process of depeasantisation of the rural population: almost complete (Czechoslovakia), partial (Hungary) and abandoned (Poland). The process of change of rural communities also varied: embourgeoisement in Hungary (Szelényi 1988) and the professionalisation of peasants in Poland, which according to Jacek Kochanowicz (1988) created an ambivalent group of “modernised peasants”.²⁶⁰ Collectivisation and the way it was conducted created the “initial state” for the de-collectivisation of agriculture after 1989. The post-communist transformation assumed different forms and procedures in all of the countries in question; with the exception of Poland, they were defined by privatisation and reprivatisation. De-collectivisation in Poland involved the privatisation of state farms and the destruction of the quasi-cooperative environment of agriculture; agricultural production cooperatives, whose number was negligible, were not an object of interest for the reformers. Following this process, each of the countries in the region ended up with similar production structures in agriculture, though their share differed from country to country. Looking at this in terms of the agricultural production structures, collectivisation and then de-collectivisation threw the agrarian structure of Czechia, Slovakia and Hungary off their historical dependence paths (Maurel 2004), which did not happen in Poland, due to collectivisation having been abandoned. This varied process of de-collectivisation of agriculture also resulted in different social dynamics: in countries with collectivised agriculture, social movements were focused around reprivatisation and its principles, something that was absent

²⁶⁰ On the one hand, these peasants contested the policy of repressive tolerance and restrictions on the development of family farms, while having to cooperate with the centrally planned economy on the other, remaining in what was virtually a symbiotic relationship with it (cf. Halamska 1995, Eng. 1999).

in Poland. The privatisation of state-run agriculture that had been formed on non-peasant land did not stir emotions, but there were a large number of small farms that were torn from their symbiotic continuance in the socialist economy and thrown to the lions of wild capitalism. Those “modernised peasants” were the first group in Poland to demonstrate their displeasure on the toads.

The period of transformation, which coincided with preparations for European Union membership, was a time of “anticipatory socialisation” (Gorlach 2006), which also involved preparing for reintegration into the global economy. During this period, the countries of Central Europe were forced to form a system of institutions compatible with the EU system, a great many of them being intended to serve the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), the EU’s only economic policy. This was yet another top-down modernisation, and affected not only rural areas; this time it mainly involved areas of cultural regulation: institutional structures and mechanisms of functioning. CAP implementation has its “national” variants, indicating which areas of social life are considered important.²⁶¹ This is confirmed by observation of the LEADER (*Liaison entre actions de développement de l’économie rurale* – meaning *Links between actions for the development of the rural economy*) programme’s implementation, which suggests the “adjustment” of the European model to local political and civic cultures.²⁶²

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In this context it is worth asking about the scope, depth and essence of the modernisation that has been taking place. It will be helpful to refer to Ulf Hannerz’s (1989) concept, according to which cultural flows are mostly one-directional, from core to peripheries. Originally, modernisation is supposed to coincide with the scenario of cultural saturation, in which – during a historical

²⁶¹ To ensure social peace, in Poland special emphasis is placed on welfare and the maximisation of benefits under direct payments. Other questions, e.g. environmental issues, have evidently been marginalised (cf. Śpiewak 2011).

²⁶² A very interesting analysis of ways of implementing the LEADER programme was presented by Pascal Chevalier (2012). The Visegrád Group countries indicated the same main objective: improving the standard of living. Poland chose a partially decentralised management model, while the other three countries chose a centralised one. The basis for distinguishing a Local Action Group (LAG) was geographic and cultural cohesion in Czechia and Poland, employment area in Slovakia, and the existing institutional division in Hungary. They also differed in the criteria of financing: not very precise (Czechia and Poland) and precise (the others), and in the management model in relation to European instructions: tighter in Poland, involving a very strong position of institutions in Slovakia and Hungary, and rather free in Czechia. With the exception of Czechia, in these countries “the operators of the transfer (in other words the state) complicated the procedures and appear to have been more concerned with management (by tightening the regulations) than with innovation” (*ibid.*, p. 51).

longue durée – “peripheral countries slowly, with some resistance, in the course of several generations, replace local cultural ideas, meanings and values with uniformised content coming from the dominant cores” (Sztompka 2003, p. 594). The peripheral countries’ achieving of a state of not only technical and economic but also social and cultural modernity,²⁶³ is only a matter of time. But invoking the concept presented in *The Modern World System* also encourages us to consider other situations, when the process of change stops at a certain stage and the social reality diverges from the models created in the core. Hannerz sees two such situations: scenarios of “cultural deformation” and “cultural amalgamation”. The former involves two mechanisms: selection eliminating more advanced content and “a compromise reconciling content flowing from outside with local customs and traditions” (ibid.). The latter involves a clash in the exchange of content between the core and the peripheries, stimulating creativity and originality on both sides. A “creolisation” or “hybridisation” of models occurs. In the century-long process of change considered here, we have contended with both scenarios. There can often be a problem in identifying the model when it has become an object of deformation or amalgamation. As Wallerstein has shown, Poland and all of Central Europe lies on the peripheries (or semi-peripheries, if we want to feel better) of the global system. But there are also peripheries at the junction of three civilisations: Western, Orthodox Christian and Islamic, as Szűcs captured so well in *Three Historical Regions of Europe*. In various periods, models have flowed to Poland and the region from different civilisational cores. One excellent example of both the multitude and the variable origins of models can be found in the clothes worn by Polish gentry. Until the mid-16th century the nobility followed Western fashion. Later on, however, the arch-Polish *kontusz* robe became widespread; the pattern came here via Hungary from the east, probably from the court of Suleiman I the Magnificent. And it cannot have been just the model of the *kontusz*.

²⁶³ Stemming from the definition of modernisation as a process leading to modernity.

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