

Introduction

For several years in succession now, the "Rural Areas" team of the Committee for Space Economy and Regional Planning of the Polish Academy of Sciences (KPZK PAN) has been organizing themed conferences devoted to different spatio- and socio-economic aspects of Poland's rural areas. Attesting to this are the publications from KPZK PAN prepared and published jointly with, among others, Warsaw Agricultural University (SGGW), and more recently also the Białystok School of Economic¹. This publication, entitled Poland's rural areas two years after European Union accession, with particular reference to the 'Eastern Wall', represents the gleanings from a conference that took place under the same name at Radzików near Błonie on 9th and 10th May 2006. At this juncture I would like to take this chance to thank the staff at the Białystok School – and most especially the present Rector, Prof. Zbigniew Ejsmont – for the un-failing financial and other support they provided in organizing the Conference at the time and in bringing into existence the joint publication we present here.

A little consideration needs to be given to the choice of Conference title, with its two (general and more specific) parts. We know on the one hand that the period of time passing since Poland's May 2004 accession is too short to allow for more fundamental changes in the way the country's rural areas are utilised. Equally, a start of groundbreaking importance as regards the potential transformation has definitely been made, on the basis of EU funding (see the article by Prof. F. Tomczak). In the years 2004-2005 alone, the direct payments framework saw Polish farmers obtain more than 7 billion zł. The inflow is to grow steadily greater in 2006 and subsequent years. Overall, the EU has allocated more than 11 billion euros to the development of rural ar-

¹ a) *Możliwości wielofunkcyjnego rozwoju wsi polskiej w kontekście integracji z Unią Europejską*, Studia KPZK PAN, vol. CX, Agricultural University, Warszawa 2000.

b) *Wies polska w świetle wyników NSP 2002. I PSR 2002. Aspekty społeczne, ekonomiczne i przestrzenne*, A. Stasiak (ed.). Biuletyn KPZK PAN No. 213, Warszawa 2004.

c) *Przestrzenne aspekty rozwoju wsi polskiej z uwzględnieniem obszarów depresji społeczno-gospodarczej*. A. Stasiak, R. Horodeński (eds). Studia KPZK PAN, vol. CXIV, Warszawa 2005.

areas in the country over the 2007-2013 budgeting period (see article by Prof. A. Kowalski). It is in the above ways that two of the articles here have concerned themselves with general issues relating to the possible transformation of the Polish countryside.

Further articles included here relate to the subject matter of rural areas insofar as this relates to the five voivodships (province-regions) of eastern Poland, which is to say Warmia-Mazury, Podlasie, Lublin, Podkarpacie and Świętokrzyskie voivodships. Four of these fall within what has for some time now been called the “Eastern Wall” of Poland, while a fifth region of Świętokrzyskie voivodship has been added to the list, since it resembles the others in manifesting lower values for GDP per head than any other regions in the European Union as configured currently (see Figs. 1 and 2). In 2005, the Luxembourg Presidency of the Union put forward a proposal that special funding for the development of these regions worth around 3 billion euros be mobilised². Conscious of this declaration of intent on the part of the EU (as well as the real situation in the target regions), we determined to devote the second half of the publication to a description of the rural areas in the five aforementioned voivodships. To this end, we turned to selected academics representing different regional centres with a request that they prepare papers and articles. The results of their work form the detailed half of the present publication.

I would like at this point to thank the then Prime Ministerial Plenipotentiary in matters relating to Eastern Poland – Mr Wiesław Kamiński – for his participation in the Conference, his address with its very much substantive content and his contributions to the discussions held.

We trust that this publication may serve as one of the important elements fostering increased awareness of the situation in rural parts of eastern Poland.

Now embarked upon under the leadership of Secretary of State at the Ministry of Regional Development Władysław Ortyl is the compilation of a large study to be called *A Strategy for the Socio-economic Development of Eastern Poland in the Years to 2020*.

In closing, I would like to make reference to a number of general or specific issues. First to a positive phenomenon most likely influenced by direct payments per ha of agricultural land that have taken in around 1.4 million farmer-producers, *i.e.* the markedly reduced area of land left fallow in the im-

² *The Development of Eastern Poland (Rozwój Polski Wschodniej)*. Operational Programme, draft by the Ministry of Regional Development, Warsaw, July 2006.

mediate aftermath of accession (from c. 1.4 million ha in 2004 to c. 1 million ha in 2005³. Connected with this has been an increase in land prices. As of 2005, the average cost of farmland exceeded 8200 zł per ha, which is to say some 1600 zł more than in 2004 (or a 24% rise)⁴.

A negative phenomenon has concerned low grain prices, while an increase in livestock production has to be seen as a good thing. Nonetheless, there has still been an opening of the so-called "price scissors", meaning a growing disparity between prices obtained from the sale of agricultural products and the costs associated with the purchase of goods and services. The data in the Central Statistical Office publication cited attest to this, as does Figure 3.

I would also seek to draw the reader's attention to the diverse rural settlement network in the voivodships in question; this being associated with mean village size, population density and the degree of formal urbanisation (share of the population that is urban). The rural areas of the five voivodships making up eastern Poland are home to some 4,200,000 people in around 12,700 villages (meaning an average village size of c. 330 inhabitants, cf. around 345 in Poland as a whole). However, a look at each voivodship in turn reveals marked differences; the c. 150 people per village in Podlasie standing in some contrast with the 240 noted for Warmia-Mazury, the 315 in Świętokrzyskie voivodship and 350 respectively characterizing Lublin voivodships and the figure of no fewer than 830 or so people per village in Podkarpacie. Such differences obviously have a very significant influence on the management and investment space in the Polish countryside. Where numbers of inhabitants are small, the costs of municipal investments are higher, as are the operating costs once facilities are in place. There is also a problem with the location of basic public investments, kindergartens, schools, health and welfare centres. Linking up with the latter are major differences in population density in the traditional sense – figures ranging from c. 25 people per km² in Warmia-Mazury and Podlasie, *via* 48 people per km² in Lublin voivodship, up to figures as high as 64 in Świętokrzyskie voivodship and around 75 in Podkarpacie. There are also differences in the degree of advancement of formal urbanisation, from the very low level noted in Podkarpacie (where c. 40% of inhabitants are urban), *via* figures of 45-40% urban in Lublin and Świętokrzyskie voivodships, to

³ *Agriculture in 2005*. Central Statistical Office. Warsaw, 2006.

⁴ *Ibid.*

a relatively high (c. 60%) share of the population living in towns and cities in the case of Podlasie and Warmia-Mazury⁵.

There are also significant differences in the occupational structure of the rural population in the area in question. Nevertheless, data from the 2002 Census reveal that rural households having work in agriculture as their main source of income represent c. 12% of the total in Podkarpacie voivodship (with a very major role played by the so-called dual-occupation farmer-workers), in the region of 17-18% in the Warmia-Mazury and Świętokrzyskie voivodships, c. 23% in Lublin voivodship and as much as c. 34% in Podlasie. It is thus the latter that emerges as eastern Poland's most agricultural voivodship⁶. Indeed, it occupies a very high position in the context of Poland as a whole⁷ (see also Fig. 4).

Also noteworthy are the fundamental differences in the size structure where farms are concerned. While a farm covers an average of 3 ha in Podkarpacie voivodship, that figure reaches 18 ha in Warmia-Mazury. Matters of nature and the protection of a very diverse natural environment are also important here.

This short discussion of rural issues in Poland (and most especially in the eastern voivodships) makes it clear that we have before us a great deal of research work to do on Poland's rural areas as a whole, and the eastern voivodships in particular.

In concluding, I would like to express once more my gratitude to Wiesław Kamieński, the staff at the Białystok School of Economics, the authors of the presented papers and articles, the participants at the Conference and the Conference organizers, most especially Ms Mirosława Ryba and our indefatigable Editor, Ewa Ryżlak.

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⁵ *Powierzchnia i ludność w przekroju terytorialnym w 2004 r.* Central Statistical Office, Warszawa 2004.

⁶ See A. Stasiak: *Przemiany struktur demograficznych i społecznych wsi polskiej po 1946 r. Wizja przyszłości*, Biuletyn KPZK PAN No. 213, Warsaw, 2004.

⁷ *Zróźnicowania regionalnego rolnictwa (Regional Differentiation of Agriculture)* devised under the leadership of Prof. dr hab. Józef Zegar, Central Statistical Office, Warsaw, 2003.