

INTRODUCTION

It seems that the rural areas and their labour markets in Poland are in a sort of peculiar lethargic condition as opposed to the cities and metropolitan areas in particular: one can get an impression that in most villages, which are not directly connected with urban agglomerations, the economic and socio-cultural changes are slow and rather shallow. In the two main strategic documents of a territorial character – *National Strategy of Regional Development 2010-2020. Regions, Cities, Rural Areas* and *National Spatial Development Concept 2030* - establishing the hierarchy of goals for the national development within a time span of the second and third decade of the 21st century – the ‘rural issue’ is in fact a marginal problem. The strategy of regional development concentrates on strengthening the competitiveness of the regions and cities, whereas the national spatial development concept does not list, in express terms, the rural areas as a significant field of activity among the six goals of the national spatial development policy.

The assumed density of population in metropolitan areas is connected with the continuing outflow of population from the peripheral – rural areas and the pressure to continue the policies connected with reaching economic and territorial cohesion. They can facilitate the use of the developmental potentials of villages and provide opportunities to create new places of non-agricultural employment, in particular in the sphere of assuring access to basic goods (telecommunications, transport, business environment infrastructure) and basic public services (education, health care, culture). Placing them in sub-regional and local centres (small towns and selected villages) with the improving conditions of communicative availability, meets the challenges that rural areas face, as well as consolidates the labour markets in the country.

The *Strategy for sustainable rural development, agriculture and fisheries by 2020* (2012) concentrated mainly on the challenges of sustainable development of rural areas. What constitutes the main threat for this development is the outflow of population from spacious rural zones, which are peripheral on a national, regional and local level. The structure of the rural population, and the labour market as a result, is getting worse and the level of unemployment is rising. What is one of the basic problems of unemployment in rural areas are its hidden forms which are connected with the threat of poverty and the numerous negative social and functional consequences.

The restricted access to public services (among others, pre-school care, health care, education, culture, administration), which not only reduces the mobility of vil-

lage inhabitants on the labour market but also significantly reduces the opportunities for diversifying the economic functions of the countryside, is one of the most serious problems of rural areas. However, such problems do not concern rural areas to the same degree. The lower level of human capital as well as worse access to public services is connected with the questions of the peripheral character of the rural areas, which concerns their significant part.

The rural labour market has been combined with the revenues of the population, which are still significantly lower than in the city, and the people working in agriculture (hunting, forestry and fishing are of a marginal character) constitute the largest group within the structure of the employed. The share of people employed in agriculture is regionally differentiated (from 37% in the Śląskie Voivodeship to 80% in the Podlaskie Voivodeship), which has serious consequences for the functioning of the regional labour markets. It is estimated that the resources of the labour force do not constitute a barrier for the development of agriculture, whereas a low quality of human resources is a significant problem for the development of modern forms of farming in the country. The decreasing number of people connected with the sector of agriculture on the one hand makes the pressure exerted on the non-agricultural labour market in the countryside bigger, but on the other it results in the outflow of younger and better educated people to the city and abroad. While the employment in agriculture decreased over the years 1995 – 2008 from 25.5% to 14.2% (data by Central Statistical Office [GUS]), it is still really high in the categories of EU-27 (6% in 2006).

The small share of non-agricultural activity in shaping the sources of income and the structure of employment of the rural population is one of the main developmental problems of the rural areas in Poland. It is an issue resulting from numerous factors, from which the lack and discrepancy of non-agricultural places of employment in the country and in the nearby environment (small towns, sub-regional centres), the lack of flexible forms of employment (teleworking), the low availability of labour market in the city (low professional qualifications of the inhabitants of villages and the poor opportunities of transport to larger towns), as well as the scant professional mobility of the rural labour force, can be counted as the most significant ones.

Most of the above mentioned issues have been discussed in the presented selection of articles, paying attention to the difficult and long-lasting process of economic and social transformation of the rural areas, as well as the deepening territorialisation of rural development. Krystian Heffner (University of Economics in Katowice) analyses the rural labour markets in Poland from the aspect of the significance of work resources in the country for the possibility of multifunctional development of rural areas and strengthening the growth potential of urban centres. It is beyond all doubt that the increasing diversification of the developmental path of rural areas in Poland and the complicated situation on the rural labour markets, as well as disputable approaches as to the manner and direction of supporting the changes in the country, require further analyses and scientific representations. The suggested volume provides

a certain initial picture of the situation within the scope of the rural labour markets in Poland in the context of the processes occurring in the country as well as the policies aiming at providing direction to the development of rural areas.

In her article *Typology of Peripheral Rural Areas - Anatomic Approach*, Monika Stanny (Institute of Rural and Agricultural Development, Warsaw) makes an attempt to determine the rural areas of a peripheral character in Poland and group them according to the similarity of the socio-economic features (socio-economic typology). By identifying the developmental characteristics in the peripheral regions – the basis for shaping the local developmental strategies – she looks for, first of all, the most important internal (endogenous) development factors. She also demonstrates that a proper concentration of external public resources is remarkably important for the development of marginalised areas. Two further articles have been devoted to the significance and influence of the instruments of external support for the development of rural areas in Poland. Danuta Kołodziejczyk (Institute of Agricultural and Food Economics – National Research Institute in Warsaw) concentrated on the changes in the spatial diversification of the water and sewer systems on rural areas in Poland, which have undergone particularly intense changes due to the EU funds (*The Spatial Diversity of Water Supply and Sewer Systems in Polish Rural Areas in the 1995-2010 Period*). Roman Rudnicki (Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń), on the other hand, presents the spatial diversification of the use of European resources by agricultural farms in Poland over the years 2002-2010 and carries out an assessment of the importance of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) instruments for stimulating the rural labour markets in Poland to activity. Krzysztof Janc (University of Wrocław) and Konrad Czapiewski (Institute of Geography and Spatial Organization, Warsaw) carry out an analysis of the importance of education for the development and intensification of the rural labour markets by popularising the information and communication technologies (ICT). They point out significant discrepancies between the theoretical solutions and the common practice of applying new technologies on the rural areas (*The Internet as a Development Factor of Rural Areas and Agriculture – Theory vs. Practice*).

The text by Andrzej Gałązka (Warsaw School of Economics) raises the question of the long-term trends and transformations in agricultural production in Poland (*Long-term Transformations of Agricultural Production in Poland. Selected Issues*). Due to the extensive character of the problem concerning production in the agricultural sector, the analysis refers only to the selected subjects and issues.

Wioletta Kamińska (Jan Kochanowski University in Kielce) – raises the issue of the classification of the rural areas in Eastern Poland due to the quality and significance of human capital for the development of local communities. She carries out an analysis of the typical difficulties connected with qualifying the various elements of human resources to the determined typological groups (*Human Capital in the Rural Areas of Eastern Poland – Classification of Spatial Units*).

Krystian Heffner and Robert Rauziński (Silesian Institute in Opole) present the evolution of the migration processes in a substantially rural region where they are gradually becoming the main element of the economic and social changes (*Migration Trends in the Largely Rural Regions in Poland. A Case Study of Opole Silesia*). The majority of processes caused by the outflow of people abroad results in negative developmental changes, in particular in the country. What can counteract these negative phenomena are the undertakings stimulating the inhabitants of the rural areas to activity (financial and organisational support), especially those peripherally located (young people, graduates mainly, professionally passive people) and having a significant migration capacity.

Iwona Kopacz-Wyrwał and Mirosław Mularczyk ((Jan Kochanowski University in Kielce) apply a typological approach in order to carry out an analysis of the functional diversification of the rural areas in the Świętokrzyskie Voivodeship (*Functional Diversification vs. Living Standard of Population in the Rural Areas of Świętokrzyskie Voivodship*). They make an attempt to connect it with the standard of living in the selected areas, which are characterised by the dominance or prevalence of certain functions.

Monika Wesołowska (Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin) concentrates on the demographic problems that the rural areas in the Lubelskie Province face, which result in the gradual depopulation of numerous local zones and the disappearance of villages in many regions (*Demographic Process in the Lubelskie Voivodeship*).

*Krystian Heffner
Wioletta Kamińska*