

COMMUNIQUÉS

The 40th Anniversary of the Institute of Rural and Agricultural Development, Polish Academy of Sciences

The Institute of Agricultural and Rural Development was established at the Polish Academy of Sciences in autumn 1971 (www.irwirpan.waw.pl). The 70's epoch had just begun and the political climate was favourable. Dyzma Gałaj, sociologist and politician, was able to realize his original idea and create an interdisciplinary organization for the integrated study of rural and agriculture issues. This new organization was a development of the Industrialized Regions Research Unit, the “research arm” of the Polish Academy of Science’s Committee for Industrialized Regions Studies. The Unit was established in 1962 and greatly contributed to the consolidation of Polish sociology after 1956. Therefore, from the very start, the Institute had an experienced group of researchers who developed the basic methodological rationale which was to revolutionize the existing approach to countryside and agriculture: the holistic and inter-disciplinary approach. Heated discussions of the inter-disciplinary methodology evolved into a model (only a working model, unfortunately) of the interrelated social problems of the countryside which was also to serve as the basic research design. In a way, the Institute was a precursor of the networking approach in social studies.

The Institute’s 40-year history can be divided into two almost equal epochs: the decline of real socialism with its turbulent social crises, and the systemic transformation and European accession. Each epoch was unique. Prior to 1989, the Institute had to negotiate numerous ideological and political restrictions. Freedom of research, discussion and conclusion drawing was considerable but not unlimited. The uncollectivized village and peasant agriculture, the peasantry per se and their inferior social status were politically sensitive issues. As far as service *pro publico bono* is concerned, the Institute and the vast majority of its staff sided with the peasants and the village, heedless of the obligatory doctrine. This, of course, did not make life at the Institute easy. It was here that the problems of rural families, the rural elderly without access to social security, education, peasant farming and obstacles to its development were studied. The 1989 turning point liberated researchers from former restrictions. Research projects were now very individualized and researchers were receptive to new theoretical approaches. But the post-communist transformation brought its own new problems due to the confrontation of the old and new social orders and emergence of new market and democratic dynamics. In the 1990s, researchers addressed such transformation problems as privatization, decollectivization, the evolution of peasant farming, the social organization of the countryside, or the value of transformation. The leitmotif of much of the post-2000 research was EU integration and its conse-

quences for farming and agriculture, the countryside, or the living conditions and wellbeing of rural communities. In other words, the Institute faculty is observing the emergence of a new social order and is often only recently beginning to identify the perversions of real socialism on the basis of their long-term consequences.

The Institute now staffs 48. Employment was largest shortly after the establishment of the Institute, in 1974, when it had a staff of 95. Despite the interdisciplinary ideal (never completely realized), the structure always included two basic disciplines: agricultural economics and rural sociology. Today there are four departments: Rural Economics, Rural Sociology, European Integration, and Sociology of Youth and Education. However, the Institute also employs cultural anthropologists, geographers, demographers, and philosophers. Only in the 1980s were there double structures: the departments and formal functional structures, i.e. research workgroups. Today these workgroups are created at hoc to solve specific research problems. The Institute operates according to its own rhythm: one of its permanent institutions, from the very start, has been the open seminar which always convenes on the first Monday of the month. The seminar has a high attendance. The Institute's publications are *Wieś i Rolnictwo* [Village and Agriculture], a quarterly which has been coming out since 1973 (and is now running at 153 issues), and *Problems in Rural and Agricultural Development*, a book series authored by the Institute faculty and now boasting over 200 titles.

A brief anniversary communication like this must of course be rather banal. It is impossible to convey the significance of the Institute, evaluate the output of its staff and their contribution to various scientific disciplines in a few words. Or to show its public opinion shaping functions or its impact on rural policy. Especially when one has been affiliated with it for forty years, as I have.

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