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A Hundred Years of Village Monographs in Poland Jubilee Reflections

Abstract: Monographs of local rural communities played an important role in Polish sociology until the 1970s. They had been preceded by numerous sociographic descriptions and social surveys made already in the first half of the 19th century. Numerous critical remarks made about classical (descriptive, encyclopedic) monographs, which stressed that such accounts lacked a representative character and provided no material for formulating general conclusions, that they represented a synchronic and not a diachronic approach and contained redundant details, were justified. However, the best monographs in Polish sociology met all the strict methodological requirements and their most important value was a reliable description of social reality, which has been neglected since the moment of the popularization of research conducted with the help of questionnaires that concentrate mainly on the analysis of the respondents' awareness. Traditional monographs seem to represent an interesting approach to scientific investigations, even from the point of view of present dilemmas in social sciences (the postulated restraint on the part of the author, incoherence of culture, the researcher's ethos, science's non-involvement in temporary matters). Therefore, it is worth examining this inconsiderately abandoned genre of sociological literature.

Keywords: monograph, representative character, redundancy, falsification of general theories, diachronic scope, scientific and political meaning of the detail.

The bigger the difference between reality and appearances, facts and words, people who act and the intellectuals who interpret those actions is in a country, the more important become the details.

Antonio Gramsci

The History and Theory of Monographs

Monographs of local rural societies are one genre of sociological writing in Poland which—along with the analyses of personal documents—once gained the title of being the 'calling card' of Polish empirical sociology. At the beginning of the 20th century monographs were a sign of the reorientation of the discipline of sociology, which was slowly moving away from theoretical issues concerning general social development and turning instead towards more practical problems occurring in specific environments. As a consequence, Polish sociology could focus on matters set in a more familiar context, which was quite attractive for Polish researchers. Up until that time it had been developing along "logical" rather than "historical" lines ("Polish authors tend to be well acquainted with foreign theories, but rarely drew on previous Polish

studies” stated Jan Stanisław Bystron in 1917 [Bystron 1995: 540]) and generously shared, or at least lent, its scientists to various sciences of other countries (Ludwik Gumpłowicz to Austria, Bronisław Malinowski—to England, Leon Petrażycki—to Russia, Florian Znaniecki—to the United States). A thorough study of certain places and social groups in the country at the time of the partitions and being torn between three foreign governments was particularly significant, as it prepared the grounds for the future unification of Poland by showing the similarity of cultures and historical fates of all the partitioned lands. Another manifestation of the tendency was a monumental (14-volume) *Geographical Dictionary of The Congress Kingdom of Poland* (Warsaw 1880–1902), which was to witness the integrity and unity of the Polish land, regardless of political divisions. The monograph method, carried out in later years, constituted a valuable counterbalance to mass studies and quite often questioned their results.

Although neglected in the 1970s, monographs have been recently gaining interest. An important factor here has been the growing popularity of the ideas of localism and local problems in social sciences seen in Poland after 1989. These tendencies, however, have not been reflected in a marked renaissance of this type of research. In fact it is still “in the stage of a deep crisis. Within the last fifteen years only one study has been published based entirely on monographic analyses. Another symptom of this crisis is the fact that research practices gradually lean away from the academic model of monographic studies” (Przybyłowska, Zygmantowski 1995). Since the mid-1990s a couple of studies have appeared which could be called monographs, yet not in the common understanding of the term: *Klasa i kultura w okresie transformacji: antropologiczne studium przypadku społeczności lokalnej w Wielkopolsce* [Class and Culture in Times of Transition—an anthropological case study of the local community in Wielkopolska] by Michał Buchowski (1996), *Polish Peasantry in the 20th Century—a microdescriptive approach* by Etsuo Yoshino (1997) and *Spoleczne tworzenie ojczyzn. Studium tożsamości mieszkańców Mazur* [Social Construction of Homelands. A study of the identity of the inhabitants of the Mazurian Lake District] by Wojciech Łukowski (2002).

Chronologically, in Polish sociology there were usually ethnographic monographs published (out of which the greatest achievement in the 19th century was the 86-volume work by Oskar Kolberg entitled *The People*), then there came a time for ‘economic’ monographs—as for example the works of Franciszek Bujak, and finally sociological monographs, mostly devoted to a particular given problem. It is worth mentioning the work by Józef Chałasiński, entitled *Antagonizm polsko-niemiecki w osadzie “Kopalnia” na Górnym Śląsku* [The Polish-German antagonism in the factory settlement ‘Kopalnia’ in Upper Silesia](1935). Comparative monographs were published, like for instance Wincenty Gortat’s *Góra Bałdrzychowska and Byczyna* (1923) and consecutive monographs like Franciszek Bujak’s *Maszkienice* (1901 and 1911).

The most important features of the monograph genre were first of all the holism of the approach, the emphasis on the interrelations of components, intensive and long-term field research, the personal participation of the researcher, use of various methods which would complement each other, the interdisciplinary nature of

the research, work not on statistical data but typological analysis, and what is more, treating a given local community as the object of research and the context of the examined phenomena, yet at the same time as an independent variable (Lutyński 2000). A classical scholar of Polish rural sociology, Władysław Grabski, once drew up a set of guidelines for future authors of rural environment monographs. The scheme included a general description of the location; soil classification; data concerning precipitation; solar exposure; temperatures; the growing conditions of the plants and the breeding conditions of the animals; data concerning the village as a community; a presentation of the economy, employment, management and possession of land; and information about the material and spiritual culture and social life in such a historical perspective as allowed by the existing sources (Grabski 1936).

At this point two comments have to be made. Just like it would be a misunderstanding to treat every study placed in a certain environment as a monograph, it also does not seem right to look for appropriate operative patterns in academic books, when we have a number of various realizations that do not necessarily have to be combined into one paradigm. There is one more reason behind the assumption that it would be more interesting to look at selected items from the numerous output of Polish monographic writing. The aim of reading these texts is to prove that the advantages of such approaches (though rarely mentioned) outnumber—in my opinion—its limitations (more frequently discussed). The year 2003 was the hundredth anniversary of the publication of Franciszek Bujak's work *Żmija*, which is considered to be the first real village monograph in Poland. An anniversary is therefore an appropriate occasion to give this issue some consideration.

What are the charges then put forward against monographs in the fields of various scientific disciplines? We have to remember that numerous descriptions (a detailed and descriptive analysis) of rural areas categorized either as ethnographic or sociographic (Adamus 1959) contained a lot of archaic elements, which proved the age and originality of national culture while at the same time being colorful and picturesque were the object of interest for the first collectors of folk antiquities. In turn, the authors of descriptions, while trying to picture socio-economic realities, often stepped onto "the wrong road of erudition and the collecting of curiosities" (Rychliński 2001), neglecting the basic goal which was to recognize reality in such a way which would later make it possible to work effectively on a particular area. Their other mistake was their lack of a fully professional research methodology which forced them to use official and therefore inexact statistics. These circumstances created a growing, widespread need "to research the national relations more thoroughly so no doubts exist regarding their actual condition" (Bujak 1901). This was Bujak's goal when he made the first attempt to compile a scientific monograph of his home village, Maszkienice. The conclusions formed then in 1901 influenced the shape of this type of monograph—later described as Bujak, encyclopedic or inventory—and were criticized (not entirely fairly) for their numerous faults and limitations. Below we will look at the most common critical remarks and demonstrate their lack of support by using tangible examples.

The Question of Representativeness

What raised doubts in the first place was the haphazard choice of the object of study and therefore the question of its representative value. Maszkienice was a place where Bujak was born, while Żmiąca was where he went to cure his lungs. This, however, did not exclude the precise though *ex post* description of Maszkienice as the type of “village inhabited by farmers and workers, i.e. an overpopulated village, with not enough land to feed its population, therefore a large part of the population is forced to emigrate for work” (Bujak 1901). It also did not exclude the recognition of relations in Żmiąca, which at that time were very untypical for Galicia but were common in the area of Limanowa.

We can distinguish three perspectives of the Polish reflection on the issue of the representative value of monographs. The first one is Jerzy Topolski’s concept of an “integral representative monograph,” according to which the village chosen as the object of study should accurately reflect the specificity of a given socio-economic region (Topolski 1966). The second proposal, formed by Bogusław Gałęski, aimed at choosing a village representing a certain village type, but not necessarily concentrating on only one area (Gałęski 1962). The third understanding of the representative value was proposed by Zbigniew T. Wierzbicki, who suggested a random selection of villages situated 100 km from each other, along two geographical axes bisecting the country horizontally and diagonally (Wierzbicki 1971).

The published monographs took into consideration the requirement of representative value as understood by their authors, depending on the aim of their research. For many years intensive industrialization justified the changes taking place in the so-called industrialized regions, as well as making it possible to compare them with processes taking place in areas distant from industrial centers. The first of the three approaches to the problem of the representative value mentioned above was used in Eugenia Jagiełło-Łysiowa’s reflections on the creation a farmer’s professional awareness (Jagiełło-Łysiowa 1963), which was a combination of the memoir method and comparative monographs of a few villages, and Włodzimierz Winclawski’s analysis of different educational environments (Winclawski 1973). The latter author in his other work (on the educational environment of the peripheral village) ventured to describe in more detail the typicality of a studied village based on the typologies found in literature (Winclawski 1973). The effect of these analyses was the statement that “the degree of representation of our village in its historical development decreased from virtually 100% in the pre-industrial period to 29% in the 1960s” (Winclawski 1971). As for Wierzbicki’s original proposal for the systematic research of villages selected through the parallel-meridian procedure, it was applied in the works on the *Polish Ethnographic Atlas*.

Probably the most popular argument against the questionable representative value of monographic studies is the inability to generalize the information provided beyond the area where it was collected. In other words, a belief that such analyses contribute at most to the extensive increase of knowledge. Such objections are a result of either negating or misunderstanding the basic element of monograph genre convention,

which is the assumption that a chosen society is just one case of a broader class of phenomena or an attempt to see in that society a picture of another society (broader, more complex or dispersed—simply less accessible in the cognitive sense). Using this concept of a monographic study we see it as a type of analysis which uses the actual model, that is, according to Piotr Sztompka, “any such community that is empirically studied not so much with the aim of gaining information about it in particular, as to indirectly find information about another community” (Sztompka 1968). The modern mass procedures using representative samples also have the features of a model study because their aim is the reasonably valid reflection of the structural relations typical for the overall population. However, while the communities described in monographs are a real natural model, any samples selected by the researcher will have the character of real artificial models.

This kind of thinking about the benefits of using the monographic method motivated such people as Józef Chałasiński, a precursor of the so-called problem monograph, in which a broad description of a certain community is subject to the main goal—namely to cast some light on a chosen issue regarded as especially important both on a local and broader scale. The first village monograph written according to that concept was Katarzyna Duda-Dziewierz’s *Wieś małopolska a emigracja amerykańska. Studium wsi Babica powiatu rzeszowskiego* [The Villages of the Małopolska Region and American Emigration. A Study of the Village of Babica in the Rzeszów County] published in 1938. Duda-Dziewierz’s book, read after nearly seventy years, demonstrates the main ideas of the problem monograph, as well as of the outstanding advantages of monographic writing in general. In addition, it is hard to resist having the impression that when viewed from today’s perspective, the work exceeds expectations. The author not only managed to capture in a micro-scale a number of regularities connected with the village migration process before World War II, but also discovered and precisely described a certain, more general pattern typical for Polish labor migration including the ones we observe today and on the scale of the whole society. The 2001 book *Ludzie na huśtawce. Migracje między peryferiami Polski i Zachodu* [People on the Swing. Migrations between peripheral Poland and the West], edited by Ewa Jaźwińska and Marek Okólski, fully confirms those observations made long ago in the village of Babice in the Małopolska region. First of all, a similar group of people decided to emigrate then as now such as the marginalized population (today these are the people with a lower education level who have been eliminated from the local work market and find the worst paid jobs in the West; in the past “emigration attacked the village from its social peripheries, starting with groups of people more loosely connected to the village rather than the settled peasant element which dominated economically and socially in the village”) (p. 29). Second, those social peripheries were, and still are, at the same time peripheries in a spatial sense (in the village of Babice migrants recruited from the population settled away from the ‘center’—in *przysiółki* (peripheral settlements) and the so-called Budy; in today’s Poland they come from under-invested, poorly developed areas strongly marked with unemployment). The third, strikingly similar feature of both pre-war and today’s migration trends is the domination of incomplete migration: people from Babice did not go to America

under the influence of some innovative social aspirations. They went to buy a cow, to build a barn, to pay off their brother or sister and then came back to their country, to their former professional activities (p. 85).

Likewise, a striking feature of today's migrations from the regions of Poland 'B' is that they are subject to the 'survival strategy'—their function is to maintain the same consumption level and to prevent social degradation, but they do not serve as a driving force of development neither on the individual nor on the local scale. Last but not least, the fourth rule that brings today's processes in line with the pre-war migration tradition (or maybe it is better to say that it lets us see the anticipation of today's mechanisms in the past phenomena) is the definitely conservative and non-modernizing influence of migration and migrants on their local environment. Duda-Dziewierz emphasized the fact that there was no re-emigrant in Babice whose social role had changed fundamentally after returning to his/her home country. She wrote: "Those who came back to the village, came back to farming and they did not come back to farming with innovations" (p. 86). As it turns out today the mobility analyzed in their book is mainly a factor which strengthens stagnation. No innovations are brought from the receiving society to the sending society (Okólski, Jaźwińska 2001: 131). The authors even claim that "international mobility is increasingly contributing to the inhibition of economic changes instead of being their catalyst" (p. 327).

An argument which is sometimes brought up in the discussion about the representative value of monographs is that they are "not addable" as they are at most a collection of detailed but separate studies which cannot be combined into one larger study. However, that argument does not withstand criticism. If we remember how rural unemployment was assessed in Poland in the 1930s, it becomes clear that individual cases described in numerous monographs were by all means "addable" because it was possible to put them together into a coherent picture. Polish rural sociology has two major studies on the problem of rural unemployment, and both of them either leant on previously existing monographs in order to extrapolate the regularities noted there or skillfully used the monographic method in studies of selected environments.

The first approach was used by Józef Poniatowski in his work called the *Przeludnienie wsi i rolnictwa* [Overpopulation of the countryside and farming], published in 1935. Using the so-called normative method he described the optimum population level for Poland at that time, which came to less than 30 occupationally active people per 100 computational hectares. Assumed numbers automatically determined the scale of overpopulation, which on the whole reached 8,800,000 'redundant' people (those who were employable and their families), a number so high that it shocked society. Calculations used by Poniatowski would not have been reliable or even possible if he had not based his assessments on the detailed and arduous calculations made by such authors as Curzytek, Gortat or Stolarski. For example data provided by Błażej Stolarski suggested that the work demand for one hectare equaled 0.40 of an adult's ability, while monographs such as Gortat's *Góra Bałdrzychowska and Byczyna* said that there were 1.29 inhabitants per hectare of overall land area and that number included 0.52 elderly people and children and 0.77 employable adults. Accepting these

numbers as an average for the country relations as a whole meant that, as Poniatowski writes, “subtracting 0.77 – 0.40 gives a 0.37 surplus of occupationally active people per one hectare, an average number for small farms. Multiplying that result by 13,797,238, i.e. the number of hectares of the area belonging to farms smaller than 20 hectares, the author gets 5,104,978 adults who are employable but not employed” (Poniatowski 1935: 25).

The second case is represented in the work of three authors, Ludwik Landau, Jerzy Pański and Edward Strzelecki, called *Bezrobocie wśród chłopów* [Unemployment Among Peasants], published in 1939 by the Institute for Social Households [Instytut Gospodarstwa Społecznego]. It consists of the results of analyses conducted in 53 precisely described villages of the Republic of Poland at that time. The number of the ‘completely redundant’ assessed on the basis of farm owners’ declarations came to 2,400,000. However, a second method was also used to examine the situation in more detail. An attempt was made, using as a model the materials gathered by the invaluable Puławy Research Institute for Rural Households [Puławski Instytut Naukowy Gospodarstwa Wiejskiego], to assess the number of the ‘partially redundant’, as characterized by Ludwik Krzywicki. In order to achieve this, the existing workforce resources were compared with the possibilities of using them on estates. The number of the ‘partially redundant’ obtained that way outnumbered the first figure nearly twice.

The question of the advisability of generalizing the results of monograph research apart from the issue of representativeness (understood as an application of generalized data for a broader population) includes also the question of making generalizations in respect to the theoretical interrelationship of features. The former question is all about reformulating individual findings made in relation to the community examined for general findings, which are crucial for other similar communities. In the latter question, however, the problem consists in indicating the conditions of a transition from individual statements (showing empirical relations between certain phenomena) to general statements (which postulate the existence of constant and necessary relations between the said phenomena) (Turowski 1977). While a generalization concerning a whole population is possible only when the procedure of enumerative induction is applied, a generalization consisting of showing a theoretical connection requires referring to the concept of analytic induction (Znaniński 1934), an integral element of which is the formulation of a hypothesis. According to Jan Turowski, who analyzed post-war studies of Polish researchers, all scientifically significant and valuable monographs satisfy the need for a formulation of a general explaining hypothesis (Turowski 1977: 116). For example, Danuta Markowska in her study concerning rural families assumed that a historically defined type of rural community corresponds with a certain structural type of family, as well as the nature of its family and neighborly links (Markowska 1964).

The examples shown above strongly confirm the importance and virtues of the monograph, which is not only useful in its own right, but can also become a tool for analyzing more general phenomena. However, in order to appreciate monographs, one has to know their advantages and remember their numerous merits.

Other Merits of Monographs

Seeing the virtues of this approach in the fact that it helps to gain more insight into facts appearing on a broader scale, one cannot overlook other arguments that point out the greater advantages of using the monograph. It seems undoubted that while a certain location would stay individual in its specificity and distinction, one should not deny the importance of the observations made there, especially when the discovered phenomena prove more general tendencies, but also when the discovered facts about the location contradict the general rules, or even disprove, some findings that have the rank of theories. An important virtue of monographic studies, which is indeed falsification and not the verification of major theories, has often drawn attention. Polish monographic output also provides a lot of interesting examples in that respect.

One of these examples can be Bogusław Gałęski's conclusions drawn from the analysis of the dissemination of innovations in peasant farming in the 1960s, when it turned out that despite assumptions and general opinions, innovations faced resistance in the rural areas around Poznań, always thought to be more modern when compared to the backward villages of Podlasie. To make matters worse, peasants who stubbornly stuck to the individual form of ownership, which was at that time regarded as backward and anti-developmental, were ahead of farmers on cooperative farms—then treated as centers of progress and modernization—when it came to their readiness to accept innovations. The author called such observed irregularities a paradox, which lied in the fact that “in more traditional villages or groups with lower level of rural culture the process of diffusion is faster than in villages which have been more economically developed in the past” (Gałęski 1971: 244).

Another observation, which in turn called into question the opinions concerning the urbanization of the Polish rural environments, can be found in a study by Anna Olszewska. The seemingly insignificant fact observed by the researcher that the television set is usually not placed in a very prominent place in a rural household, but is rather put in the kitchen, led her to reflect on the importance of the media in the life of a rural community. As the author concludes, “a certain role has been set for the television to perform, namely that of providing the entertainment within the frame of the existing mode of life. Television has been subordinated to that mode, and it has not changed the latter in any visible manner” (Olszewska 1969: 145). Consequently, it meant a selective reception of the content presented in the media, and the perception was determined by the specific cultural ‘filter’ of a given rural society. The accepted content, according to the ruling set of values, usually caused a lively reaction and became a subject of conversation and comments. The content too diverse from the local reality would be treated as coming from a different world, and as a result it would not gain the binding pattern-constructing role. It is true then that the rural set of values changed very slowly and for years it served as an ‘independent variable’, contradicting thus the commonly accepted role of urbanization.

It is sometimes said that the social sciences have two presumably complementary approaches: they can study society through a ‘telescope’ (quantity representative studies) or a ‘microscope’ (quality studies). However, what can be done in a situation

when the microscope allows us not only to see better but even to see something different?

The last issue that will be addressed here is the dilemma of static versus dynamics in monographic studies. The question whether and to what extent it is possible to step beyond synchrony in a monographic description draws our attention back to specific texts which in one way or another considered the diachronic dimension of analyzed phenomena. The most obvious solution is to reach for the comparative method, and two versions of it can be considered: territorial and chronological (Topolski 1968). Compared units can represent different phases of development caused by the influence of certain factors. They can therefore present consecutive stages of their own transformation or the transformation of similar systems.

The point of panel comparative monographs was the study of the same society repeated (usually twice) after different time intervals. Bujak's Maszkienice saw further study ten years after the original work. Kazimiera Zawistowicz-Adamska, encouraged by the historical outline of the Zaborów village made by a peasant activist and cultural animator Jędrzej Cierniak, conducted a broad study in the village in 1938. The outbreak of war stopped the publication of the results yet the effect of the researcher's stay in that area was a book called *Spolecznosc wiejska* [The rural community] consisting of the author's personal reports, which can easily be called the Polish *Sadness of the Tropics*. After 35 years Maria Wieruszewska took up her Master's research, and what she used as a reference for her own monograph of Zaborów was not the text of an earlier study (because such never appeared), but the saved materials from Zawistowicz-Adamska's interviews and field studies (Wieruszewska 1978). A renewed monograph of Żmiąca, 50 years after Bujak's original, was prepared by Zbigniew T. Wierzbicki and currently the Institute of Sociology of the Warsaw University is preparing to conduct research there for the third time—on the centenary of the first venture.

There is yet another possibility to 'activate' the static picture of a given local community and to enrich it with a time dimension, and that is to consider not only present data in the description but also historical materials. This tradition was initiated by Bujak, who when describing Maszkienice went back as far as the 14th century and continued in numerous works from the so-called Kraków historical school. The school was run by Kazimierz Dobrowolski, a man inspired by Ludwik Krzywicki's concept of historical ground, who postulated the use of an interdisciplinary research method called the integral method. Along those lines monographs were written such as the historically-ethnographic *Dzieje wsi Niedźwiedzia* [Story of Niedźwiedzia Village] by Dobrowolski (1931) or Władysław Kwaśniewicz's *Wiejska spolecznosc rzemieslnicza w procesie przemian* [The rural craft community in the process of transformation] (1970).

An original approach was also proposed by Wincenty Styś who wrote a book called "The paths of rural economic progress" where he presented the history of his home village Husów, reconstructed on the basis of preserved documents from consecutive years. Comparing Bujak's and Styś's research methodologies leads to interesting conclusions which confirm the monograph's ability to deal with the problem of time

in a number of ways. Jerzy Jasiński writes: “In order to get a picture of developmental changes Bujak repeated the study of the same village after a certain time. The novelty of Styś’s research procedure was the unusual tendency of using historical-genetic analyses while adhering to his fundamental economic and sociological orientation. He analyzed the socio-economic phenomena and processes in a long time period and with respect to broad cause-result conditions that enabled him to capture tendencies and regularities more precisely. Therefore Styś’s method is compared to the filming system and Bujak’s approach to photographing developmental processes” (Jasiński 1986: 229).

Thanks to the researcher’s diligence we also learn about such additional details like for example how many eggs (200) and how many hanks of yarn (1,788) were given to the manor in 1773 and even how many of those eggs and hanks were turned in by Jakub Kwolek, Paweł Magoń or Szymon Styś. One might of course not bother about such trifles, calling such practices a “humorous jumping around of the facts,” beyond which lies a “naïve belief that...something will rise from a simple accumulation of the so-called facts” (Szczyrkiewicz 1969: 33). But of course it will rise. Thanks to his meticulousness, Styś was able to assess the scale serfdom placed on the village inhabitants as being in the region of 15% of the village’s workforce while at the same time in Poland the average size of serfdom duties exceeded 65% (Kochanowicz 1981). It was stepping down to the level of a single farm that allowed Styś to discover the fact that when the Husów manor replaced serfdom with rent in 1782 it did not so much exceed Emperor Joseph II (who abolished ‘captivity’—‘Leibeigenschaft’ and introduced a system of ‘limited serfdom’—‘Untertanigkeit’) in his generosity as it preceded it in an attempt to ‘break even’.

In those often criticized monographs of previous years one can find many other outwardly small and unimportant pieces of information. However, when placed in the right context they become meaningful, and a grateful reader appreciates the fact that the author did not omit them for being less important and unnecessary. One of such examples is Bujak’s description of how the people of Żmiąca occasionally changed the kind of potatoes they cultivated. For example in the end of 19th century the so-called ‘champion’ potato (‘championy’ in Polish) came to Żmiąca and was renamed by the local population as ‘szczepiony’, and as the author writes in just eight years the whole village did not grow other potatoes than ‘szczepiony.’ Is it an unimportant detail? Not at all. If we read in Eric Fottorino’s work that in the middle of the 20th century peasants from a certain region of France needed only 9 years to replace the local sort with the American one (Fottorino 1999: 153) we see clearly that Polish peasants as early as 50 years before the French ones were quicker by a whole year when it comes to the pace of absorbing innovations. If so, then the common opinion repeated also today that the Polish farmer is distrustful, backward and resistant to changes turns out to be not more than a stereotype, which is surprisingly popular especially among Polish politicians, the so-called influential elites and some sociologists.

The remarks sketched here concerning the classic village monograph in its shape typical for Poland aim to point out certain advantages of this not necessarily out-of-date approach. Regardless of the benefits we can have from reading the existing texts

once again, it is worth considering whether the traditional monograph (if somebody made an attempt to revitalize it in current conditions) does not offer the solution to many problems of contemporary social sciences. If today's sociology made an unfortunate (as many think) shift from studying a specific reality to the study of "social awareness the contents of which are analytically extracted and make the basis for statements about the condition of social reality" (Kwaśniewicz 1999: 44); if sociologists currently lament over the lack of contact with facts and as a result "contemporary Polish interactive reality remains beyond the reach of sociological studies" (Czyżewski 1990: 102); if contemporary humanities give voice to the need for the return to the detail as a carrier of cognition free from the emptiness of grand ideas and from the captivity of objectified categories (Rorty 1996); finally, if the loss of contact on the part of social sciences with real people and places leads to, as Bourdieu (2001) writes the elimination of the autonomy of this discipline, appropriated by the world of politics, media and expert circles, then would not a reliable monograph, even down-to-earth and meticulous, be the remedy for all these scarcities? And if that is the case then the only thing that is left is a loud call: back to Żmiąca!

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