

SOCIOGRAPHY OR RURAL SOCIOLOGY?

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Abstract

The author raises the question of the beginnings of Polish rural sociology, the legitimacy of binding its genesis only with the year 1918 and the restitution of independence.

In the first part of the article he critically analyzes a quite commonly dominant view, according to which numerous dissertations on the social life of a village appearing 100 or even 200 years earlier cannot be considered sociological (at most sociographic). He puts forward the thesis that in a situation where contemporary rural sociology is grappling with a crisis of identity, and losing the institutional back-up, it is desirable to discuss this controversial issue again.

In its second part - performing exegesis of selected studies on the Polish countryside and Polish agriculture from the 18th and 19th centuries - tries to prove that it is difficult to deny them the sociological status, as the knowledge they contained was: methodically acquired (means using research methods and techniques); expressed in a language containing defined terms, referring to theoretical systems; and enabled to answer different types (descriptive, explanatory, prognostic and practical) research questions.

Keywords: methodological, Status of sociological knowledge, the genesis of rural sociology, methodical and theoretical awareness of the first rural sociologists, rural sociology and social practice.

JEL codes: A14, B11, B12, B41.

It is not difficult to cite, based on rich literature on the subject, arguments indicating that Polish rural sociology – similarly to its national mutations in other countries of Central and Eastern Europe (hereinafter CEE)¹ – belongs to the oldest sociological fields of study, and what is more, during its existence, it evolved more intensively than other specific sociologies. And the statement that it was more practical and socially involved than them, no matter what this concept would mean, should not give rise to controversy. In addition, in no other ones – as you might think – we were dealing with development stages so closely determined by the turning points in the twentieth-century history of Poland: regaining independence (1918) and its loss as a result of the outbreak of World War II (1939); the end of the war resulting in the emergence of People's Poland (1945) and its dismantling as a result of the creation of the Solidarity social movement (1980-1989); and finally the deliberations of the Round Table (1989), initiating the process of political transformation. In the Polish rural sociology, the historical facts indicated are quite widely recognised as basic periodisational turning points – distinguishing three phases in its development: institutionalisation (1918-1939); urbanisation (1945-1989) and the search for a new paradigm (after 1989)² – which I perceive as one of its important properties distinguishing

¹ Being aware of considerable simplification, I use the term Central and Eastern Europe in the sense of: a geographical and historical region, “marked out from the north by the Baltic Sea, from the west by the Elbe and Lithuania, from the south by the Danube and the Black Sea, and from the east by the Dnieper” (Sowa, 2011, p. 18), until the end of World War I dominated by four great imperial powers (Austria, Germany, Turkey, Russia). After World War II, as a result of the Yalta Agreement, formed by societies and nations of the countries dependent on the Soviet Union. Therefore, Central and Eastern Europe is made up of Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary and Romania and Bulgaria, as well as the Republics located on the Baltic coast and today sovereign countries formed after the collapse of the former Yugoslavia (Kaleta, 2017, p. 343).

² I omit their detailed characteristics, referring those interested to many studies of prominent Polish rural sociologists of all generations fundamental for these issues (Grabski, 1936; Gałęski, 1966; Bukraba-Rylska, 2008). At this point, with telegraphic economy of words, I limit myself to pointing out that the phase called institutional (sometimes “golden”) – represented by the so-called founding fathers: Franciszek Bujak (1875-1953), Władysław Grabski (1874-1937), Ludwik Krzywicki (1859-1941), and also in some sense Florian Znaniecki (1882-1958) – was characterised by the emergence of the first academic structures (Department of Rural Sociology at the Warsaw University of Life Sciences) and the development of research enabling explanation of the nature of rural life. In the practical layer, it claimed the right to a decent life for its inhabitants, including the peasant stratum which dominated the then social structure. In the second period (of Polish People's Republic urbanisation) – marked by the names of rural sociologists born in the Second Polish Republic, shaped on the traditions of the “golden” period: Józef Chałasiński (1904-1979), Kazimierz Dobrowolski (1894-1987), Dyzma Gałąj (1916-2000), Bogusław Gałęski (1921-2010), Jan Turowski (1917-2006), Zbigniew Tadeusz Wierzbicki (1919-2017), and in a sense also Jan Szczepański (1913-2004) – Polish rural sociology focused its interests on analysing the possibilities of equalising the cultural standard between the countryside and the city, pointing to the inevitability of urbanisation processes as a result of which the urban universe eliminates the rural one. The third phase (of the search for a new paradigm) was dominated by interest in the far-reaching consequences of the loss of the rural socio-economic and socio-cultural specificity, primarily as a result of urbanisation processes first, then by the process of political transformation having a nature of imitative modernisation, and finally globalisation and computerisation. For understandable reasons, it is difficult to identify its most prominent representatives now (creating here and now), but the reader will find the names of several of them in the list of literature used in my study.

it from the rural sociologies practised in the countries of the so-called West³. Rural sociologists from both distinguished parts of the globe are united by the belief that the development of the discipline – as a full-fledged discipline of science – was preceded by the phase called “pre-sociological” (Winclawski, 1985, p. 4), or “pre-institutional” (Bodenstedt, 2003, p. 283). In Poland, dated roughly on the entire nineteenth century and the first two decades of the twentieth century (until the end of World War I), it was characterised by a focus on socio-economic research mainly of peasants⁴, but at most, classified as sociographic research.

³ For example, Bodenstedt (2003, p. 283) proposes a separate periodisation of the development of rural sociology for the US and Europe in the institutional period (1920-1970 and 1945-1970, respectively), followed by two common phases: of critical self-reflection (1970-1980) and, after 1980, checking paradigms. In turn, Low (2010; as in: Gorlach, Klekotko and Nowak, 2012, p. 222) examines the history of the sub-discipline by referring exclusively to the American perspective in which he distinguishes two development periods: institutional of 1910-1950 and international after 1950. It is only in the latter that, under the influence of absolutely dominant Americans, European varieties of the discipline are formed.

Polemising with the presented way of thinking of both outstanding researchers representing the so-called Occidental Europe, it should be (first) pointed out that both varieties of sociology (American and European) in the second half of the twentieth century enter a common development trajectory on which it is difficult to see the rural sociology of the countries of the so-called Occidental Europe (meaning CEE). While, for reasons which somehow defend themselves (e.g. Iron Curtain), one can understand their point of view when they speak about the 50s, 60s or 70s of the last century, the failure to see the rural sociology of our part of Europe in the 1920s or 1930s, be it only because of the biographical method (in the world, also called Polish) and the Bucharest monographic school, is harder to explain.

Secondly, the proposed periodisation method moves the birth of rural sociologies in countries such as Germany, France or Great Britain only at the end of World War II, losing the earlier period of their development from the horizon. Meanwhile, we know that in 1920-1945, for example in Germany, even though there is a weakening of the dynamics of social rural and agricultural studies in the aftermath of World War I, it does not prevent the initiation of the institutionalisation process of rural sociology, as a result of which already at the end of the 1920s this subject began to be introduced into curricula of agricultural school at various levels. In the 1930s, following restrictions imposed on social sciences by fascists, the interests of rural sociology focused primarily on the mythologisation of German peasantry in the theoretical convention of racial theories, and this was done under strict political supervision of the Office for Race, Biology of the Nation and Rural Sociology established in 1935. In 1939, its director (H.F.K. Günther) publishes the first German textbook of rural and agricultural sociology: *Gospodarstwo chlopskie jako forma życia i wspólnoty* (Peasant farm as a form of life and community) (Kaleta, 1993, pp. 97-98).

⁴ The dramatic nature of the socio-economic situation of the peasantry and the need for its empowerment is an important theme of pre-sociological rural interests also in other European countries, especially of the CEE. For example, in Romania thanks to Dimitrie Gusti (Wierzbicki, 1991, pp. 15-16), or in Slovakia where early sociology, focused primarily on the issue of nationality, could not fail to notice the peasantry which was the most numerous social stratum (Winclawski, 1991, pp. 64-65). The peasant stratum and its place in the nineteenth-century society is also a central topic of interest for other leading rural sociologists from countries of Central and Eastern Europe, including: Bulgar – Ivan Hadjiiski; Croatian – Valtazar Bogišić; Czech – Innocent Bláha; Slovak – Anton Štefánek, Ukrainian – Mykhailo Hrushevsky, Hungarian – Ferenc Erdei, which are mentioned in the works by (listed in the relevant order): Julita Pieńkosz (427-441), Włodzimierz Winclawski (361-365 and 357-360), Zbigniew T. Wierzbicki (419-425), Łukasz W. Dominiak (461-463), Michał Głuszkowski (443-449), Zoltán Bugovics (381-389), in the fourth part (*Klasycy socjologii wsi krajów Europy Środkowej* (Classics of rural sociology in the countries of Central Europe)) of the volume *Cztery dekady socjologii na Uniwersytecie Mikołaja Kopernika* (Four decades of sociology at the Nicolaus Copernicus University) (Kaleta, 2012).

Also in Germany, the early stage of pre-scientific development of rural sociology is characterised by studies classified as the so-called peasant ideologies, glorifying free peasantry, promoting agrarian reforms and criticising the morally fallen stratum of great landowners (Kaleta, 1993, p. 91).

This research, as opposed to sociological research, was characterised (merely) by gathering empirical material and its possibly simple description, focused mainly on social practice. For sociology – treating sociography as an auxiliary discipline – it was to be the basis for deeper and more systematic inquiries, referring to the theoretical background, which only (supposedly) gave a chance to understand the essence of social phenomena.

There has not been and still is no dispute among Polish rural sociologists⁵ of different generations as to the cognitive and ordering utility of the reconstructed method of periodisation of the discipline's development stages. However, some discrepancies have arisen as to the dating of its beginnings, the legitimacy of linking the origin with 1918 and the restitution of independence. Because sometimes the following question was asked: why at least some of the issues, raised in numerous studies on broadly understood rural life already in the eighteenth century, cannot be recognised yet/any more as rural sociology. What is the reason – Wierzbicki (2012, p. 410) investigated in the study on Górski⁶ – “that we treat him here only as a precursor of certain concepts, and not as a pioneer paving the way for his successors”.

The dominant – as it seems today – discourse in this matter was imposed by Grabski, quite commonly considered to be the father of the Polish rural sociology. Commenting on this subject already in the 1930s, in a longer study devoted to the reflection of matters of the countryside in Polish science, including primarily in agrarian history and policy, he stated that agrarian monographs characteristic of both disciplines appearing throughout the entire 19th century, “do not include much material for rural sociology” (Grabski, 1936, p. 19). He only considered the 20th century monographs of villages by Bujak important; according to Grabski (1936, p. 21), he “immediately gave an example worthy of causing many imitations. For now, however, there were no facilities which could encourage and publish such works. It was only after the establishment of the Polish State that the conditions conducive to the organisation of scientific work were created.”

⁵ Rural sociologists from other countries of the CEE seem to share a similar point of view. In formulating such an opinion, I mainly use the findings included in studies devoted to the classics of rural sociology in the countries of this region of Europe (R. Andorka, V. Bogišić, I.A. Bláha, F. Erdei, D. Gusti, M. Hruszewski, K. Paltorakas, A. Štefánek, and the precursors of Bulgarian rural sociology) published in the periodical *Eastern European Countryside*, in the section *Classics of Central European Rural Sociology*, in 1996-2013); but also in a collective work, published in 1971, thanks to the efforts of the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the Polish Academy of Sciences and the Section on Rural and Agriculture Sociology of the Polish Sociological Association, entitled *Problems of the Development of Agriculture and Information on the State of Rural Sociology in Various Countries*.

⁶ In 1886, Górski (1818-1908) published the fundamental – as Wierzbicki writes (2012, p. 410) – work for this earliest period of development of the Polish rural sociology, entitled *Znaczenie większej własności i obowiązków większych właścicieli ziemskich w Królestwie Polskim* (The importance of greater property and duties of major landowners in the Kingdom of Poland) (Górski, 1886). According to Wierzbicki (2012, p. 410), it seems legitimate to state “that Ludwik Górski was a precursor of rural sociology and even more – of agricultural sociology, skilfully combining agricultural and farming issues with the issue of socio-economic and socio-moral relations. Only a hundred years later Bogusław Gałęski and Jan Turowski, who by the way are scientists of different fields of knowledge, would take over the reins, creating a subdiscipline under the common name “rural and agricultural sociology.”

More or less the same will be said many decades later by Wierzbicki (2012, p. 410), indicating that it is hard to recognise the works of Górski – of which, as already pointed out, he was an admirer – already as sociological because he, unlike Bujak⁷, had no institutional support for his search. “So Górski, like many other eminent intellectuals in the Kingdom, became a private scholar who found it difficult to gather students and followers of his research and work around him.” Winclawski (1985, p. 5) also supported the opinion of both coryphaeuses of Polish rural sociology, adding that apart from the institutional “underweighting,” Polish pre-sociological thought was conceptually unfinished, because it lacked references to sociological theories which resulted in a high degree of freedom in interpreting analysed issues.

However, merely noted ways of thinking and arguing were not the only ones. Mleczeko (p. 10), citing a number of facts worth considering, makes the first one of Polish rural sociologists (fathers of Polish rural sociology) Kolberg (1814-1890) who is “widely known in Poland as the one who collected and documented the state of artistic culture of the people of the Polish Lands, mainly peasants”. Even though “Kolberg-ethnographer obscured Kolberg-sociologist”, but “he also took interest in folk customs, and thus the way of life of the people” (p. 12), i.e. the problems which today are considered to be the basis of the sociological view of matters of the countryside. A similar way of thinking about the genesis of the Polish rural sociology appeared in the fundamental *Socjologia Wsi Polskiej* (Sociology of Polish countryside) by Bukraba-Rylska (2008), published only 10 years ago. In her opinion (2008, p. 17), if we assume that “one can talk about the existence of a discipline when it selects its subject of interest, defines methodological foundations and conducts research, even if it does not take place within academic institutions..., it must be assumed that in Poland rural sociology has been practised for about 200 years, because the first works on the so-called peasant matter come from the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century”.

In my study – dubious about the lack of alternatives for the thesis on Polish rural sociology as a beneficiary of the statehood regained in 1918, only creating opportunities for its institutional development – I return to the beginnings of the subdiscipline. In accordance with the postulate of treating sociology as a continuation and a different form of pre-sociological knowledge (Sztompka, 2002, p. 20), I will try to prove that, in the light of what and how often Polish intellectuals from the 18th and 19th century wrote about the problems of the countryside, the thesis about the pre-sociological phase of development of rural sociology or its status of only sociography is not particularly strong confirmed in facts. Thereby I negate the statement that it could not be practised without institutional support. A somewhat frustrating statement, let us admit, in a situation where contemporary Polish rural sociology is close to losing it. Confronting only the number of scientific and research institutions functioning today focused only or mainly on sociological

⁷ Formally associated with the Jagiellonian University, later with the Jan Kazimierz University, and the Institute of Rural Economy in Puławy.

research of rural areas and trade magazines with what we had at the beginning of the political transformation (1989), and in the recent (1945-1989) and more distant (1918-1939) past, we observe a regression⁸ which calls into question the possibility of further existence of the discipline.

My methodological framework which objectifies and arranges the statement is the thesis of Sztomka (2002, pp. 20-21) according to which it is difficult to recognize as pre-sociological knowledge the judgments about reality: (a) obtained methodically (i.e. using research methods and techniques); (b) expressed in a language including defined terms and referring to theoretical systems; and (c) which enable answering various types of (descriptive, explanatory, prognostic and practical) research questions.

Using the outlined cognitive model, I give an exegesis of selected studies on Polish countryside and Polish agriculture, published mainly in the 19th century, primarily using the analyses of Żabko-Potopowicz⁹ in his two dissertations: *Polska nauka o społecznym gospodarstwie agrarnym* (Polish science of the social agrarian farm) (1934) and *Wieś polska w świetle polskich prac naukowych i publicystycznych z okresu przed uwłaszczeniem włościan* (Polish countryside in the light of Polish scientific and journalistic works from before granting land to peasants) (1936); which I consider to be fundamental for my considerations. I use the studies of other researchers to a smaller extent, including in particular: Mleczek¹⁰, Wierzbicki (2012) and Winclawski (2004, 2011).

⁸ The problem is discussed extensively in the article by Andrzej Kaleta: *Polska socjologia wsi okresu transformacji ustrojowej. Wyzwania przyszłości* (Polish rural sociology in the period of political transformation. Challenges of the future) (Kaleta, 2014). At this point I would just like to signal that from 1 October 2019 – as a result of organisational transformations taking place in higher education due to the so-called Act 2.0 – the last university organisational unit (Department of Sociology of Rural Areas of the Institute of Sociology of the Nicolaus Copernicus University), whose central focus was rural sociology, will disappear.

⁹ Antoni Żabko-Potopowicz (1895-1980), Polish agricultural economist and economic historian, author of many scientific and popular science papers, also concerning agrarian policy and rural sociology (Winclawski, 2011, p. 292).

¹⁰ Professor Mleczek's statement is available to me only in the typescript. Unfortunately, despite the efforts, it has not been possible to determine whether and where it was published.

Sociological aspects of the discourse on the countryside and agriculture before 1918

Precursors of the Polish rural sociology – above all economists who practise science about agrarian farming but also ethnographers, lawyers, historians¹¹ or simply publicists – are the products of the civilisational breakthrough called the Enlightenment era, which resulted in the whole of Europe at that time, e.g. in the postulates of empowering the peasant stratum by transforming non-free labour force into people of full value and rightful citizens. In Poland, reflection on the need for a radical transformation of the state of social relations in the countryside intensifies especially in the second half of the 18th century and continues until granting land to peasants in all three partitions (1848/1864/1872), strengthened (especially after the defeat of the November and January Uprisings) by conviction getting popularised among elite circles¹² that peasants are a social force without which there is no chance of regaining statehood (Mleczko, p. 8). Scientific literature (and also journalism) reflecting on a wide range of issues at the time covered by the term “peasant matter” (Gałęski, 1970, pp. 13-17) is a kind of record of public debates on these issues. However, for quite a large group of people commenting in writing – on matters of both socio-economic (agrarian structure, modernisation of the agricultural economy, the use of surplus of the rural labour force in the emerging industry, etc.) and socio-cultural nature (the place of the peasantry in society and the state, psychological traits and origin of the peasants, the nature of the relations making up the countryside, etc.) – thinking in methodical, theoretical and practical categories of sociology, then merely cutting its teeth, was not entirely something unfamiliar.

¹¹ The countryside – as a settlement and socio-economic and socio-cultural environment separate from the city (city’s alter-ego) – long before the emergence of sociology (the second half of the nineteenth century) remained the subject of interest in many fields of science, and research approaches used in them as well as the judgments about rural reality made had a significant impact first on the emergence and then on the way of practising rural sociology. Undoubtedly, and not only in Poland, rural sociology owes the most to **agricultural economics** (including its more historical varieties, functioning in the form of agrarian policy or agrarian farm science) due to the common interest in the processes of functioning of agriculture and other segments of the rural economic system, considered by many to be fundamental to its social development. It owes not much less to **ethnography** (including ethnic studies), contributing knowledge about the tradition of material and spiritual culture of the rural population to rural sociology. We must not forget about the influence of: **geography** (including agricultural geography and settlement geography) – due to interest in rural space and the search for spatial connections between social phenomena; **history** (including economic history) – due to the important role of knowledge of the past for understanding the present of the countryside; or **law** (including agricultural law) – due to interest in the normative aspects of specific organisation of production in agriculture; and many other disciplines. More on this subject (Kaleta, 2018, pp. 41-44).

¹² Of course, mainly descending from nobility which, by the way, had its negative cognitive consequences. These elites, with few exceptions, were burdened – as Żabko-Potapowicz (1936, p. 139) writes – with some significant methodological ailment, namely deeply internalised belief about the land as the property of the masters. Therefore, the discrepancy between own material interests (as usually also owners of estates) and the material interests of peasants was in defiance of rational thinking about the necessary change in the countryside, and this led to the formulation of numerous projects aimed at improving their social position, however, provided that material interests of nobility and landowners were safeguarded.

Although at the end of the 18th century and for the majority of the 19th century (which interest me) the methodological and methodical issues are not “deeply and intrinsically considered” (Żabko-Potopowicz, 1934, p. 330), it can be easily proved that those speaking about the countryside try to justify their judgments by reference to empirically explored social reality. The majority of economists dealing with the issues of agrarian farm even refer to something like a common methodology, called Skarbek’s methodological platform¹³ (Żabko-Potopowicz, 1934, p. 330). Referring to the basic assumptions of the classic school of economics – production is the primary link of every economic process, wealth comes primarily from work, and both factors have the nature of objective laws – they derive the principle of necessary compliance of economic relations in the countryside with objective regularities of social development. Unfortunately, I did not find information about similar forms of methodological awareness of sociologising ethnographers, lawyers, historians, social philosophers or publicists-social activists; however, we know that they used research methods and techniques. Already in the first three decades of the nineteenth century, the life of the countryside in each of the three partitions is experienced not only with the help of simple observations (sometimes quite fragmentary), but also methodical research of empirical nature.

The monographic method, used by Górski, who also improves it, dominates. His first district monograph from 1842, and then many others, are not only the essence of the economic aspects of the functioning of agricultural holdings but also of the evolutionary changes in the Polish countryside (Wierzbicki, 2012, p. 409; Żabko-Potopowicz, 1934, p. 329), “being half a century ahead of Polish science” (Grabski, 1936, p. 19)¹⁴. Górski is also a precursor of new ways of studying social reality:

“Therefore, he initiates the examination of court files, uses a comparative method on a significant scale and finally, as the first one, he attempts to interpret economic phenomena or supplement with sociological observation and analysis, for example in the case of serfdom, of the status of a grange worker, equality of capital and labour, agricultural education and diffusion of innovation, improvement of the situation of a rural woman and household, rural nursery schools, and savings and loan associations” (Wierzbicki, 2012, p. 409).

We also see clear signs of using sociological research methods and techniques in many others: for example, Zygmunt Wasilewski, Wincenty Badura and Stanisław Hupka use in the rural research models of Lepelley’s social inspection (Winławski, 1985, p. 4; 2001, p. 17; 2011, pp. 143-145 and 337-338), Lubomirski in works on the history of agriculture uses archival materials, in reference to the historical method of Comt (Żabko-Potopowicz, 1934, pp. 329-330), and already mentioned

¹³ Fryderyk Skarbek (1792-1866), the father of Polish economics on whose ground he transferred the claims of classic economics, supplementing them with national and social content. Supporter of economic liberalism, however, allowing state intervention to improve the position of the poorest (as in <https://encyklopedia.pwn.pl/haslo/Skarbek-Fryderyk;3975798.html>, access date: 14.04.2019).

¹⁴ Much less positively, and probably not entirely objectively, Grabski (1936, p. 20) speaks about other monographs of that time. “The researchers’ passion is directed towards the study of the country’s rural areas in terms of customs, language, songs, rituals, but economic and social life is almost entirely omitted.”

Kolberg used the method of local viewing, as he set off “in the field after getting acquainted with it, setting out a research route and providing himself with points of support and assistance from representatives of the local society” (Mleczo, p. 13; as in Górski, 1886, p. 39).

The use of various research methods was generally associated with the awareness of the cognitive importance of reliable sources of information and standardised techniques of obtaining it. Already in 1805, ethnographers from the Vilnius University use a survey to acquire knowledge about the beliefs, magic and spells of rural people (Żabko-Potopowicz, 1936, p. 140), and immediately afterwards large amounts of statistical data are included in the sociological studies of economists, which specify the analysed issues and thus legitimise better scientifically the proposed reforms (Żabko-Potopowicz, 1934, p. 334). Thanks to the activity of excellent historian and lawyer, Maurycy Handelsman, studies on the state of the Polish countryside are enriched by autobiographical documents¹⁵ (Żabko-Potopowicz, 1936, p. 143). The indicated research techniques – in later sociology, sometimes under other names, recognised as leading – are accompanied by the improvement of the methods of recording the acquired data, i.e. research tools. Kolberg – as Mleczo claims (p. 14) – is the creator of culturographic recording techniques, and Koźmian (1843), in the “noteworthy work in the field of rural sociology”, illustrates the properties of the social environment of peasants by “examples of songs, proverbs, customs of peasants as well as conversations with them” (Żabko-Potopowicz, 1936, p. 149).

Considering it unnecessary to further multiply the names and publications of this first period of development of rural sociology (called, let me remind you, pre-scientific), let us conclude that in many of them the application of research methods and techniques characteristic of sociology can be noticed. I suggest leaving without comment opinions, which can be found here and there, that even though methods and techniques appeared, they are used without observing methodological rigours, guaranteeing formal correctness, objectivity and, above all, comparability of empirical measurements.

It also seems to be beyond doubt that the results of this methodically conducted research were reported using many well-defined concepts that laid the foundations for the scientific language of our subdiscipline, which already allows theorising. Because, as I have repeatedly reported, Polish rural sociology mainly originates from economic sciences and ethnography, it should not be surprising that the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century theses are dominated by economic (*economy* – as a synonym of a landowning farm as well as national economy) and ethnographic terminology (*customs, superstitions, songs, folk stories of the Polish people*). However, we encounter the origins of truly sociological terms (*political people* – as a social group, or maybe better, a stratum of land owners but also managers of those working on it; *the commoners, the main element* – i.e. the population,

¹⁵ In 1907, Professor Handelsman publishes *Żywot chłopu polskiego na początku 19-go wieku* (The life of a Polish peasant at the beginning of the 19th century) (Warsaw 1907). Based on the diary of Kazimierz Deczyński, peasant, teacher and participant of the November Uprising, written in 1838, he analyses the situation of the serfs.

the peasant stratum; *a share in legislation, citizenship of the peasantry* – the empowerment of peasants; *moral state of the people* – the system of values; physical condition – living conditions; *peasant relations* – social relations in the countryside; *nobility in the light of their own opinions, a chronicle of a village* – sources of empirical materials analysed); including the term probably the most important for rural sociology, i.e. *the peasant matter* (later, in the interwar period, replaced by the peasant's/rural issue).¹⁶ All of them are a proof of making references – in the attempts to describe and explain the issues raised – to theoretical thought, limited by nature, mainly due to the lack of “Polish research centres for many years, which made it extremely difficult for us to create valuable works of independent nature in this area and only relatively few works before the war (mainly in Małopolska) and some post-war works may be considered as such” (Żabko-Potopowicz, 1934, p. 349). Therefore, Western thought is much more often the theoretical background of inquiries about the social agrarian farm, in fact just as it was throughout the 20th century when these scientific centres in our lands were functioning without major obstacles. Therefore, there is no reason to claim that in the nineteenth century and earlier no attempt was made “to somehow theoretically and at the same time synthetically present the socio-economic and social relations of the countryside” (Żabko-Potopowicz, 1934, p. 330).

What is more, in the works of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century researchers of rural issues we encounter references to the positivism and social teaching of the Catholic Church, physiocratic, cameralistic and populationist thought, as well as economic liberalism, psychologism and probably many others.

For example, Wierzbicki (2012, pp. 408-409) indicates “private scholar” Górski, whom he calls “a progressive conservative”, “free from class superstitions and snobbery, and whose thought and words covered entire society, without exceptions, in accordance with denominational Christian solidarism and positivist ideology”, the precursor of “the social teaching of the Church, especially that he is ahead of later encyclicals in terms of many issues.”

Żabko-Potopowicz (1936, pp. 130-136), studying selected works from the end of the 18th century, which deal with the economic and social issues of rural life¹⁷, clearly points to the inspiration of physiocratic doctrines, resulting in the emphasis on the importance of agriculture for development of the country and the postulates of ensuring a degree of prosperity for peasants and quite a significant initiative in running own farm. In others, we can easily find references to the concepts of cameralists who opt for the reciprocity of the relationship between the prosperity

¹⁶ The aforementioned concepts come only from the titles of studies analysed by Żabko-Potopowicz (1934, 1936) in his both studies mentioned above.

¹⁷ Making use of, e.g. studies by: Popławski (1774), *Zbiór niektórych materyj politycznych* (Collection of some political matters); Stroynowski (1785), *Nauka prawa przyrodzonego, politycznego, ekonomiki politycznej i prawa narodów* (Learning natural and political law, political economics and the law of nations); Staszic (1790), *Przestrogi dla Polski* (Warnings for Poland); Nax (1790), *Wykład początkowych prawideł ekonomiki politycznej* (Lecture on the initial rule of political economics); Surowiecki (1907), *Uwagi względem podanych w Polsce* (Notes in relation to subjects in Poland) (Żabko-Potopowicz, 1936, pp. 130-136).

of the state and prosperity of the countryside; or populationists pointing to the rural population – the most numerous and the most prolific social group – as deciding about the power and wealth of the country, and the countryside as a source of labour force for the emerging industry. Skarbek, mentioned above, in *Gospodarstwo narodowe*¹⁸ fundamental for development of the Polish economy, largely devoted to rural relations, directly refers to economic liberalism in the version of Smith and de Sismondi. He justifies the need for deep reforms in social relations in the Polish countryside, including the demand for granting land to peasants, with the principle of vested interest – as one of the cardinal foundations of prosperity of nations. In a similar theoretical framework, Aleksander Połujański creates the basis for forest policy (Żabko-Potopowicz, 1934, p. 329).

References to the theory accompany not only studies on socio-economic relations and conditions of life in the countryside. They also appear in studies on soul research, which in the terminology of the twentieth-century sociology are classified as social psychology. References to psychological concepts appear both in the already mentioned work by Koźmian about Polish peasants (the origin of the nation's characteristic, its virtues and vices), and above all in the study by Żukowski *O pańszczyźnie, z dołączeniem uwag nad moralnym i fizycznym stanem ludu naszego* (On serfdom, with comments on the moral and physical state of our people) (Warsaw 1830). According to Żabko-Potopowicz (1934, p. 325), being a serious contribution to the study on the social personality of a Polish peasant, as its author, even before the November Uprising, considers it necessary for further proper economic and national policy to “point to common advantages and vices of nobility and peasants”.

The result of these connections with the Enlightenment social theory – unfortunately, and maybe fortunately, let us add, mainly (as today) imported from the so-called West – were the views clearly contradictory to those dominating among the majority of estate owners; about the Polish nation composed solely of the nobility and the rest, whose right to live within the borders of the Commonwealth results from the fact that they serve the interests of landowners (Żabko-Potopowicz, 1936, p. 127).

It is not difficult to prove that eighteenth- and nineteenth-century researchers of rural matters were not only asking fundamental questions, but also trying to answer them. They did that in a way perhaps even more satisfying than their successors, because the immanent feature of the majority of their studies was direct contact with life (Żabko-Potopowicz 1934, p. 330), and the analysed issues, “being under pressure from the needs of life in the workshop of a scientist or journalist, were usually discussed with a view to giving indications on how to remove the deficiencies noted” (Żabko-Potopowicz, 1936, p. 126). In the course of research, questions and answers were formulated both of a descriptive (what is the existence of the people like, its culture, customs, living conditions and many others) and

¹⁸ F. Skarbek (1821), *Gospodarstwo narodowe* (National economy), Warsaw (as cited in: Żabko-Potopowicz, 1936, p. 131).

explanatory nature: “why the enlightened strata did not want to or could not attract people to the national cause, and the people themselves did not take their subjective role” (Mleczek, p. 9). Their practical aspect was emphasised even more strongly: what and how to do to relieve the peasant’s fate, persuade him to become more involved in the activities aimed at regaining the state, how to reorganise economic relations in the countryside to improve the material situation of the rural population, how to improve social relations and raise the educational and cultural level of peasants (Żabko-Potopowicz, 1934, pp. 320-321). Reversing the perspective of the reasoning, we can presume that the origins of rural sociology appeared under the pressure of numerous questions – especially after the fall of the November and January Uprisings – about the causes of failures; as well as answers more and more clearly indicating the need for economic, social, cultural and political appreciation of the countryside as the basic condition for the revival of Poland. This need largely forced the beginning of systematic studies on learning about this social environment, despite the severe lack of institutional background.

Final remarks

Owing to, for instance, sociological economists, ethnographers and representatives of other disciplines, in two centuries preceding 1918, a radical change in the way of thinking about the countryside and the peasant stratum took place in Poland. Social structures treated as external and foreign to the nation became its organic part. To some extent, during the process of empowering them, they built rural sociology, although it is still difficult to “indicate a strictly defined date from which the existence of rural sociology should be acknowledged because, as always in social sciences, its issues were accumulating gradually in the course of history” (Gałęski, 1970, p. 11).

Regardless of whether early studies into the social aspects of functioning of the countryside and agriculture are already considered sociological or only sociography, I have a conviction – maybe too bold but not without rational basis, but still requiring scientific verification – that in the sense of influence on social practice we do not find many equivalents for them in Polish rural sociology of later periods. Rural sociology of the “institutional” phase, and even more so of the “urbanisation” and “new paradigm”, first of all, reacted to the changes taking place in reality, to a smaller extent, like its predecessor, participating in their creation.

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SOCJOGRAFIA CZY SOCJOLOGIA WSI?

Abstrakt

W artykule podjęto kwestię początków polskiej socjologii wsi, zasadności wiązania jej genezy dopiero z rokiem 1918.

W części pierwszej artykułu krytycznie oceniono dominujący pogląd, zgodnie z którym rozliczne rozprawy na temat społecznego życia wsi ukazujące się 100, a nawet 200 lat wcześniej nie mogą być uznawane jeszcze za socjologiczne. Postawiono tezę, że pożądanym jest ponowne przedyskutowanie tego kontrowersyjnego zagadnienia.

W jego części drugiej – dokonując egzegezy wybranych opracowań o polskiej wsi i polskim rolnictwie z wieków XVIII i XIX – udowodniono, że trudno im odmówić statusu socjologicznych, jako że wiedza, którą zawierały była: zdobywane metodycznie (czyli przy zastosowaniu metod i technik badawczych); wyrażana w języku zawierającym zdefiniowane pojęcia, odwołujące się do systemów teoretycznych; oraz umożliwiała udzielanie odpowiedzi na różne typy (opisowych, wyjaśniających, prognostycznych i praktycznych) pytań badawczych.

Słowa kluczowe: Status wiedzy socjologicznej, geneza socjologii wsi, metodologiczna, metodyczna i teoretyczna świadomość pierwszych socjologów wsi, socjologia wsi a praktyka społeczna.

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