

Chronicle

ONE HUNDRED YEARS OF POLISH COUNTRYSIDE. INTERDISCIPLINARY AND INTERGENERATIONAL DIALOGUE

On 10 and 11 October 2019, a scientific conference *One hundred years of development of Polish countryside. Interdisciplinary and intergenerational dialogue* took place in Warsaw.¹ It summarised two projects of the IRWiR PAN concerning one hundred years of Polish countryside: a project under the Dialogue programme (financed by the Ministry of Science and Higher Education) implemented in cooperation with the Central Statistical Office in Poland,² and *One Hundred Years of My Farm* implemented in cooperation with Polskie Wydawnictwo Rolnicze.³ The subject of analyses in both projects were the transformations of the Polish countryside that took place in 1918-2018. The impulse for undertaking the analyses was the centenary of regaining independence by Poland.

The conference was opened by Director of the IRWiR PAN, **Monika Stanny, PhD**, who welcomed the guests. Speakers of the inaugural part also included: Ms **Halina Szymańska** – the Chancellery of the President of the Republic of Poland, Ms **Monika Rzepecka** – General Director at the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, and Ms **Beata Pukas-Turek** representing the Department of Science at the Ministry of Science and Higher Education.

The first day referred to the conference from last year *Continuity and change. One hundred years of development of Polish countryside*. Despite the similar problem structure, it was not a repetition but a complement. Last year's one focused on "continuity and change", and this year's on "intergenerational dialogue," because by giving voice primarily to researchers of the young generation, it pointed to the generational diversity of perceptions of changes. The first day of the conference consisted of four sessions: *Rural Communities, Rural Culture, Rural Economy, and Rural Space*. The speakers were mainly researchers from outside the project team, which encouraged methodological discussion.

¹ The first conference *One hundred years of development of Polish countryside. Continuity and change* summarising this project took place on 5 and 6 December 2018.

² Project: *Continuity and change – one hundred years of development of Polish countryside and agriculture. Interdisciplinary cooperation in the humanities and social studies for environmental dialogue*, head Monika Stanny, PhD.

³ The head of the project was Sylwia Michalska, PhD.

The first session of rural communities, moderated by **Prof. Maria Halamska, PhD**, was filled by three presentations. Main paper, *Rural communities: diverse responses to social changes in rural space*, was presented by **Hanna Podedworna, PhD** (Pope John Paul II State School of Higher Education in Biała Podlaska). **Monika Stanny, PhD**, and **Dominika Zwęglińska-Galecka, MA** (IRWiR PAN) in the paper *How many of us to bake bread? About changes in demographic and social structures*, focused on changes in demography and social changes of the rural population. The session ended with a paper by **Ewelina Szpak, PhD** (UW) *Polish countryside in a melting pot of changes – social and mental changes in the Polish countryside after 1945*.

The second session was devoted to rural culture. This session was chaired by **Prof. Izabella Bukraba-Rylska, PhD**. Its participants included **Prof. Roch Sulima, PhD** (ret. Prof. of the UW) with an introductory paper *Rural culture – what is emerging?*, **Katarzyna Chmielewska, PhD** (IBL PAN) with the presentation *Advancement of peasants – a double portrait*, and **Karol Krajewski, PhD** (National Institute of Rural Culture and Heritage) – *Culinary culture of the countryside – between the court and the inn*. The speakers presented reflections on the factors that shape contemporary rural culture and folk culture. The directions and stages of socio-cultural changes in the Polish countryside were also analysed.

The next session concerned the rural economy. Introductory paper *Institutional reforms and changes in the agriculture of People's Republic of Poland* was presented by **Prof. Janusz Kaliński, PhD** (ret. Prof. of the SGH). It was followed by **Tomasz Zdziebkowski** (President of Top Farms) with a paper *From a state-owned farm to a large-scale private farm*, **Małgorzata Sztoldman, PhD** (ARMA) – *25 years of support for the development of Polish agriculture and rural areas by the ARMA*, and **Prof. Andrzej Czyżewski, PhD** (UZ) and **Łukasz Kryszak, MA** (UEP) – *The agrarian issue or the rural issue? Problems of development of a modern countryside*. The session was chaired by **Prof. Jerzy Wilkin, PhD**. The statements focused on the trends and structural changes occurring in the rural economy today in the context of processes and phenomena taking place locally and regionally in Poland, the European Union and the world. Attempts were made to determine the current problem areas in the development of rural areas and agriculture in Poland, as well as to identify selected instruments of agricultural and structural policy to solve them.

The last session of the first day was devoted to rural space. This part of the session was chaired by **Monika Stanny, PhD**. **Marcin Wójcik, PhD** (UŁ) in the presentation *Man and Space. Changes in the theoretical and methodological foundations in rural geography* presented the contemporary paradigm shift in his discipline, followed by a change in perceived problems. In turn, **Przemysław Śleszyński, PhD** (IGiPZK PAN) presented the *State and challenges of spatial planning in rural areas of Poland*, pointing to the extensive ways of the planned development of rural space which need to be changed. Both speakers presented two dimensions of phenomena: the past showing the conditions and the state of development of rural space, and the future indicating the challenges and directions of changes.

The debates of the second day, held at the Central Agricultural Library, referred to the second “hundred years” project co-implemented by the IRWiR: diary competition *One hundred years of my farm*. They consisted of two parts: the session *Personal documents as a source... of only knowledge: their new forms and possibilities of using*, and the vernissage of the exhibition *Personal documents as a source of knowledge about the countryside*.

The first part of the day – a scientific session – was hosted by **Sylvia Michalska, PhD**. It consisted of the following papers: **Wojciech Doliński, PhD** (UWr) *Selected problems of the diary method – memory, reflection, record*, **Prof. Barbara Fatyga, PhD** (UW) – *Promotion and tradition do not stand in one house*, **Paweł Kubicki, PhD** (SGH) – *Diaries of peasants in the collections of the Institute of Social Economy*, and **Danuta Zalewska, PhD** (UWr) – *Experience of socio-cultural change in biographical narratives of different generational categories of residents of villages*. The speeches concerned both the theoretical and methodological conditions of the usefulness of diaries as a source basis for describing changes taking place in the countryside, and the fact that they are an irreplaceable (often complementary) source for analysing phenomena in the field of culture or family and social life.

The second part of the day referred directly to the diary competition *One hundred years of my farm*: it showed photographs included by the diarists in the studies prepared for the competition. The organisers of the exhibition told about it: **Andrzej Bieńkowski**, Deputy Director of the Central Agricultural Library, **Adam Koziolk, PhD** – President of Polskie Wydawnictwo Rolnicze, and **Sylvia Michalska, PhD** (IRWiR PAN), originator of the exhibition. The exhibition consisted of a few dozen of photographs with fragments of diaries sent to the competition. Diary materials illustrated with photographs are a record of changes taking place in agricultural holdings and in the countryside from the point of view of its inhabitants – the most important actors of social, economic and spatial changes taking place in rural areas. The exhibition was an important supplement to the analyses presented on the first day of the conference, but above all a complement the considerations of the biographical method and its expansion with a new type of document: photography.

As emphasised by **Prof. Maria Halamska, PhD**, in the summary of the first day of the conference, time was the main “hero” of the analyses presented during this (but also last year’s) conference. First of all, social time, determined by the sequence of phenomena and the frequency of their occurrence. Based on their intensification, it is possible to distinguish in the one-hundred-year period “hot periods” when changes accumulate and have a distinct character, and “cold periods” when changes occur slowly, imperceptibly. 100 years is a long period. Different turning points appear on the timeline, which is the nature of time. Generally, time can be divided into conventional time, external to phenomena, and social time. On the conventional timeline, both in the monograph *Continuity and change. One hundred years of development of Polish countryside* (Warsaw, 2019, IRWiR PAN, Wyd. Nauk. Scholar), and during conference discussions, the division into “economic and social time” and “socio-political time” was presented. Their turning points do not coincide. And yet every phenomenon, every process has its own time, its own rhythm. Researchers also have their own time, their own perception of it. Based on the papers presented – Prof. Halamska continued – we can distinguish the characteristics of the main periods of the last century:

- the period of the Second Polish Republic, which is the subject of fascination and rediscovering, mainly of its advantages, often without confronting its weaknesses;
- the period of World War II is often omitted/skipped, but is it only because of a lack of sources? Sources to describe certain problems exist or appear, but the issues are not raised – the question should be asked whether this is the case because, as researchers, we still prefer to “dream this revolution?;”

- the Polish People’s Republic period, important and lasting almost half a century, often trivialised, dismissed with simplified epithets, and as some papers have shown, a very “hot” period in which the transition from the preindustrial phase to the industrial phase took place. It is also the time of many changes which prepared the transition to the post-industrial phase, and it should be emphasised that in each of these phases the countryside has a different place in society;
- the period of the Third Polish Republic is not always appreciated, usually treated as “modern times.” But we need to bear in mind that it accounts for a third of the time of the century discussed and the time of very complex processes of transition “from real socialism to capitalist normality”.

The first, last year’s conference was filled with the speeches of researchers implementing the project which provided them with a methodological framework.⁴ This one was organised as a kind of echo of the “rural” environment for that event. This reaction from many centres indicates the importance of this issue.⁵ It enriched the whole project enormously, because the speeches stepped out of the community imposed by the project (thematic and methodological framework) which caused new problems, primarily those regarding consciousness (speeches by **Ewelina Szpak, PhD**, **Prof. Roch Sulima, PhD**, **Katarzyna Chmielewska, PhD**), in which the emphasis was put on the period of the Polish People’s Republic, describing the institutional changes taking place (paper by **Prof. Janusz Kaliński, PhD**) and those illustrating important fragments of the post-communist transformation process (speech of the President of Top Farms, **Tomasz Zdziebkowski**). New methods of analysis have also appeared in the papers, which makes us realise the development of new paradigms of change that arise under the influence of globalisation as well as environmental and climate changes. Attention was also paid to new processes emerging in the last period of the analysed century and only gradually becoming the subject of studies on rural areas in Poland (e.g. rural gentrification). Last year’s studies were more homogeneous, which resulted from their reporting nature of research conducted by researchers co-creating the project *Continuity and change. One hundred years of development of Polish countryside*. On the other hand, this year’s works are more “disordered”, it is difficult to close them within a predefined framework, and this is the result of opening of new themes, identification of new problems inherent in the subject of rural development and transformation of the Polish countryside, raised by a new generation of researchers.

Dominika Zwęglińska-Galecka, MA

⁴ As a result of this project, the monograph *Continuity and change. One hundred years of development of Polish countryside*, edited by Maria Halamska, Monika Stanny, Jerzy Wilkin; album *Looking at the countryside. One hundred years of Polish countryside*, edited by Andrzej Rosner, Ruta Śpiewak and Edyta Kozdroń; *One hundred years of my farm. Diaries of the residents of villages* prepared by Sylwia Michalska, Maria Halamska and Marek Kłodziński; *One hundred years of local authority in the Polish countryside 1918-2018* by Andrzej Piasecki and Arkadiusz Ptak; monograph *Przybyszew – the centenary of transformations of Polish countryside* by Marek Kłodziński, and *One hundred years of development of Polish countryside. Bibliographic review* prepared by Monika Stanny, Beata Górczyńska and Małgorzata Gelo-Kluczyńska were created and published.

⁵ Several dozen proposals for speeches/presentations to the conference were received. Not all of them could be presented during the conference. After passing the review procedure, they will be published in 2020 in the third volume of the monograph and in issue 4 of the quarterly “*Więś i Rolnictwo*” in 2019.