

Grzegorz Zabłocki

Rural Employment and Rural Regeneration in Post-socialist Central Europe (Project of International Research)

An international team of sociologists from Great Britain, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland plan to carry out an investigation of the process of changes in the local labour market and regional rural regeneration policy. The research project has been accepted as a part of the "Cooperation in science and technology with Central and Eastern European Countries — COST", scientific program of European Community.

Our research have two goals:

— to develop our understanding of the processes at work in the rural areas of the Czech Lands, Slovakia, Hungary and Poland as market relations are increasingly being introduced;

— to increase our knowledge of how best to stimulate local rural economies and make policy-relevant recommendations based thereon by examining the implementation of regional economic policies in specific rural areas.

Countries of East-central Europe are transforming their planned economies into market ones, and this historical process is leading to very important results in the rural regions, especially in light of the fact that in these countries agriculture was collectivized (with the exception of Poland). One of the consequences of the restoration of individual land property, family farming and market logic in the countryside is a fundamental change in local labour markets, namely increased unemployment, an increase in part-time farming, and forced social mobility and migration. These processes are also having a strong influence on the living quality of persons in rural regions and their life conditions. We would like to document the changes, but the main purpose is to find good ways for stimulating the rural economy and rural regeneration, as well as popularize methods which make the effective development of rural communities possible. We also plan to acquire theoretical knowledge about the processes of market transformation and socio-economic development of rural societies in East-central European

countries. This knowledge will help local policy-makers, mayors and local associations and organizations in their decisions and also with managing these unprecedented change.

The coordinator of the project, dr Nigel J. Swain, is Deputy Director of the Centre for Central and Eastern European Studies, University of Liverpool. He will be responsible, with local assistance, for research in Hungary. He has worked on Hungarian society and Hungarian agriculture since 1973. He has been studying political and economical problems of East-central European countries for over twenty years.

The members of the research team are:

— dr Cyrila Markova from the Research Institute for the Economy of Agriculture and Food in Prague (the Czech Lands);

— dr G. Blaas from the Research Institute for Agricultural Economics in Bratislava (Slovakia);

— prof. dr hab. Andrzej Kaleta and dr Grzegorz Zabłocki, both from the Department of Sociology, Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń (Poland).

The research will take three years. Within each country, we plan to choose six micro-regions or villages according to the following criteria:

— three villages located nearer to the country's economic core and next three located in the economic periphery;

— the three pairs of villages will represent as far as is possible three different strategies of regional economic policy: minimalist laissez-faire, pro-agriculture and pro-regional economic development. We will be measuring levels of unemployment and getting to know the nature of the local labour market. We plan to hold interviews with local employers, mayors, leaders of trade union organizations and local associations, and conduct sample surveys of the local population. The interviews will be realized at two intervals, in the first and in the third year of our research. We will try to know and test politics of stimulating local development and rural regeneration. We will observe the policy of local employment, changes in the social background of rural societies, their level of education, hopes for future employment and living conditions, nature of links with formal and informal groups for the local economy and rural regeneration.

At the beginning of January 1993, the research team was told by Brussels, that the project had been accepted, and the team has already started to its work.

