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Władysław Grabski — Founder of the Institutionalized Rural Sociology in Poland

Sixty years ago, in 1936, Polish sociology acquired the status of full institutional and scholarly development. The Institute of Rural Sociology was established at the Warsaw Agricultural University (SGGW) on 27 October 1936. In the same year the first issue of *Roczniki Socjologii Wsi* (*Annals of Rural Sociology*) was published. The journal was an organ of the Institute. The president of the Polish Republic established the National Institute for Rural Culture (with its seat in Warsaw and directed by Józef Chałasiński). Władysław Grabski actively participated in all the above mentioned enterprises. His scholarly activity in the field of social sciences had a great impact on these sciences in the first four decades of our century. He was one of the pioneers of rural sociological thought in Poland, creator of Polish rural sociology.

Grabski was born in 1874 in Borowo (the Lowicz region) in a family of landowners. His family upbringing left him with a love for his country (his father participated in a national liberation uprising), respect for the lower social classes (in Borowo peasants were enfranchised long before the state regulation) and for work as well as a cult for scholarship. At first he was educated at home, later in a Russian gymnasium in Warsaw. While at school (1883–1892) he actively participated in the activities of clandestine educational organizations where he got a chance to attend lectures of pioneers and leaders of Polish sociology, L. Krzywicki and E. Abramowski. Grabski was also involved in the socialist movement. He was fascinated by writings of Lassalle and Engels. In the last grade he withdrew from socialism and turned his attention towards ideas of solidarism and social corporationism; they left a firm mark on the way he perceived social reality. After high school graduation (1892) he began university studies in Paris. There at the Ecole des Sciences Politiques (1892–1894) he studied Political Economics, Law and Contemporary History (Albert Sorel supervised his

thesis). A year later he signed up for classes at the Sorbonne where he studied medieval history.

He returned to Poland without having completed his studies — his father's deteriorating health forced him to take over the family estate in Borowo. In 1896 he began studying agriculture at the university in Halle. His father's death in 1897 made him quit school and concentrate all his efforts on the estate. He was successful in modernizing agricultural techniques; he soon spread his activities to the vicinity (he initiated agricultural co-operatives, experimental stations, agricultural partnerships and schools for children). His activities soon took on a national character — from establishing the Drainage Society (1904), Central Agricultural Society, Association of National Work, taking a seat in the Russian Duma (1906-1912) to holding prominent positions in independent Poland (he represented the country in the Polish delegation to the Peace Conference in Paris, sat in the Polish Parliament, was a finance minister, and a prime minister famous for his successful monetary reform).

Social, political and scholarly work slowly took him away from Borowo. He and his family lived permanently in Warsaw where he held state functions and worked at the University of Warsaw and the SGGW (Warsaw Agricultural University). In Autumn 1925 he quit politics. He was then 52 and had time to dedicate himself to scholarly and organizational work. Unfortunately, it soon occurred that his time for scientific activity was limited. It was discovered that he had cancer. He died at the age of 64 on 1 March 1937.

His scholarly debut was a two-volume work on the role of the Agricultural Society in the economic development of Polish agriculture (1904). This work got an award from the Jagiellonian University. In his works Grabski always underlined issues of independence (and after 1918, 'creating a stable basis for the statehood'). He claimed that progressive and well-organized 'rural citizens' would be able to undertake activities aiming at economic and socio-cultural activating of the peasantry — a necessary condition for liberating the nation. He considered peasants to be a significant 'social force' and that was why he had conducted his research in such a socio-ideological perspective. In his work on the society he proved that it was possible to activate the society towards the improvement of the economic situation of the nation, even under conditions of political enslavement. But, above all, he tried to show that economic improvement of rural areas must be accompanied by solving social issues, that all negative characteristics of Polish peasants disappear when they are given decent living conditions and some education. This topic reoccurred in his *Materiały w sprawie włościańskiej* (*Papers on the Peasant Issues*, 1907, 1909, 1918). In the work on rural workers (1906) he introduced the multidimensional picture of the socio-economic and cultural situation of the Polish village.

He also pointed out possible ways of correcting unfavourable conditions. This picture was supplemented by *Rocznik statystyczny Królestwa Polskiego* (*Census of the Polish Kingdom*) (1913–1915), which he was involved in setting up and publishing. Data collection among rural workers directed the attention of the Russian police at him. He was suspected of political agitation and arrested. In prison he prepared the first volume of *Materiały w sprawie włościańskiej* (*Papers...*). His first university lectures and third volume of *Materiały* were prepared in prison (this time German).

Grabski's scholarly writings were so impressive that, despite his lack of academic degrees, the senate of Warsaw University asked him to lecture at the University in 1921. In 1923 he became a professor at Warsaw Agricultural University (two years later he took over the Chair of Rural Sociology). Grabski did not have much formal, systematic education. In fact he was self-educated — he had acquired economic and sociological knowledge to help solve current social problems. When conducting field interviews with rural workers, he used Max Weber's questionnaire research method (*Verein für Socialpolitik*, 1890) without familiarizing himself with the works of the founder of contemporary sociology. He was driven by solving current social problems and issues — results achieved by him in that field were impressive. With enormous practical experience, he entered the scene of academic scholarship in 1926. As a professor of economic policy, besides practical socio-economic issues (e.g. the crisis in agriculture, conditions of effective rural productivity), he began to concentrate on theory. Grabski entered the realm of sociology undertaking intensive study. His rural sociology was preceded by lectures on agrarian policy published in 1923 where he wrote: 'I underlined the need of connecting this discipline with sociology'. This was also present in the social agronomy promoted by him. Work with students of social agronomy had to lead to the conclusion that: 'our village cannot be properly understood if only looked upon from the economic perspective'. He soon started lecturing in rural sociology. He prepared a handbook for it and initiated a scholarly movement to propagate this discipline. In Autumn 1936 with his recommendation the Institute of Rural Sociology was created to 'focus research and study on rural areas as a social environment and social force'. He had begun to gather around these ideas people with whom at the end of 1936 he began publishing *Roczniki Socjologii Wsi*.

Grabski was a researcher who came into science after many years of experience of socio-economic and political activity; he was then ideologically fully shaped. His ideological credo was published in an article *Wieś jako siła społeczna* (*Village as a social force*). There, he pointed at the lack of a proper approach of Polish scientific literature towards rural issues. It lacks 'the realization of the fact that the village is an environment and a group with enormous internal dynamic values'. Defining the village as a primary

group he cited the work of Thomas and Znaniecki and broadly taking from theoretical ideas of *The Polish Peasant*. His work was stopped by illness and death. W. Bronikowski, Grabski's student and successor, was killed during World War II. He managed to prepare the third volume of *Roczniki*. Some materials from the fourth volume were published after the war in *Przegląd Socjologiczny* (*Sociological Review*) (soon closed by the communists). The second volume of rural activists' memories was published. In 1960s the idea of *Roczniki* was revived and in 1963 new volumes were published. The 110th anniversary of Grabski's birthday (1984) was commemorated by the Rural Sociological Society at the Rural Sociology Department of the SGGW by naming the Society after Władysław Grabski.

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