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## **Rural Sociology on the Eve of the XXI Century**

This paper is an analysis of rural sociology now into its second century.<sup>1</sup> The Polish chapter of the history of this discipline — only slightly chronologically briefer than the American or German<sup>2</sup> — comprises remarkable spells (particularly during the interwar period), slightly less remarkable (the period of the Polish People's Republic) as well as the most recent, which have been registered hurriedly, following the system changes in 1989 when the Polish countryside and agriculture had to face new challenges. Whether the current phase of development in this discipline turns out more like the first ('golden') period or the second ('doctrinal') only the future can tell. However, it seems beyond any doubt that modern-day Polish rural sociology must answer questions of a kind it has never — at least in our country — been asked. The first is connected with issues of self-identity, including doubts about the position of the discipline when the traditional peasant village is in the process of disappearing.

### **Academic status**

In Poland, as in other countries of the so-called industrialized West, the problem of the academic status of rural sociology appears both in the context of historical links between this discipline and general sociology as well as the socio-economic and socio-cultural consequences of the industrialization of agriculture and urbanization of the countryside.

A more precise view of the first of the above-mentioned points leads to allocating greater or lesser independence to rural sociology in the sphere of

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<sup>1</sup> Rural sociology makes its first appearance in 1892 and is on the list of topics lectured at Chicago University. See B. Gałęski, *Socjologia wsi. Pojęcia podstawowe (Rural Sociology. Basic Ideas)*, Warsaw 1966, p. 7.

<sup>2</sup> See A. Kaleta, *Socjologia wsi jako nauka (Rural Sociology as a Science)*, [in:] *Studia z socjologii wsi (Rural Sociology Studies)*, ed. W. Winclawski, Toruń 1993, pp. 85–111; idem, *Socjologia wsi w Niemczech*, [in:] *Socjologia wsi w Republice Federalnej Niemiec*, ed. A. Kaleta, Toruń 1992, pp. 19–33.

the Arts, since it differs from general sociology as regards genealogy and the interpretation of 'progress' as a category. In a study concerning the development of sociological thought in Slovakia, Włodzimierz Winclawski points to genealogical differences, by stating that the middle class and proletariat were the historical 'precursors' of sociology. Together they laid a social and philosophical basis for the creation of this discipline which reflected the way of viewing reality and the interest of these social groups. There was no room here for theoretical reflection caused by the peculiarity of the life of rural societies undergoing a rapid process of industrialization and urbanization. It is, therefore, not surprising that in the rural societies of Central and Eastern Europe (still post-feudal at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, with a majority of traditional, post-feudal social structures, established as a result of a political order imposed in this part of Europe by Russia, Prussia and Austro-Hungary) a new way of sociological thinking appears, representing the theoretical background of sociology reflecting the development interests of rural societies<sup>3</sup> — in other words, rural sociology.

A different understanding of 'progress' stems mainly from the resistance to the indiscriminate adoption of theses of general sociology (theories of dependence, integration, assimilation etc.) with an evident and theoretically proven development of societies to the status of industrialized societies. The uncritical acceptance of such an axiom leads to a situation in which rural sociology cannot create autonomous theories reflecting the development interests of rural societies.<sup>4</sup> This means accepting the dominance of industrial-urban reasoning in the theoretical and methodological foundations of the discipline.

Diametrically opposite conclusions are reached if one concentrates on the social consequences of the processes of modernization of the countryside and agriculture. Since rural sociology was always primarily the sociology of the peasant class,<sup>5</sup> it can be stated that when traditional rural (peasant) societies become transformed into entities with an urban logic, research loses its purpose. Therefore, a fast attempt must be made at integrating traditional urban sociology and traditional rural sociology into a new form, rather like settlement or regional sociology.

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<sup>3</sup> See W. Winclawski, *Lud — Naród — Socjologia. Studium o genezie socjologii słowackiej (The People — The Nation — Sociology. A Study of the Genesis of Slovakian Sociology)*, Toruń 1991, pp. 7–13.

<sup>4</sup> See Ch. Giordano, *Spółeczeństwo rolnicze — temat aktualny (Agricultural society — a current issue)*, Socjologia Wychowania AUNC 1990 (The Sociology of Education) Vol. VIII; idem, *Wiejskość jako zjawisko kulturowe (Rurality as a cultural phenomenon)*, [in:] *Socjologia wsi w Republice... (Rural Sociology in the Republic...)*, pp. 69–89.

<sup>5</sup> M. Jollivet, *Aktualne zadania socjologii wsi (The Current Assignments of Rural Sociology)*, *Wieś i Rolnictwo*, 1996, No. 1, p. 122.

Although none of the above-mentioned cases seems unjustified, nevertheless not a single one justifies the separation of rural from general sociology or its total elimination. The position of a particular discipline within the academic system is primarily defined by the subject in question, the methodological bases and applied research procedures. In rural sociology, these rather unequivocally point to its links with the study of society. Referring to Ludwik Krzywicki's attempt at putting order into sociology (presented at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century), which concerned the separation of general sociology from its specific branches,<sup>6</sup> rural sociology can be categorized as a specific sociology. However, if according to Jan Szczepański, a distinction is made between the sociology of social institutions (e.g. family, school, army, law etc.), the sociology of social communities (e.g. towns, housing estates, regions etc.) and the sociology of social processes (migration, deviation, education etc.),<sup>7</sup> a step forward is taken on the way to putting order into issues of self-identity. It is not difficult to deduce that within the proposed context rural sociology represents an integral part of sociology, and its interest lies in analysing one of the fundamental social communities, once determined by the village, nowadays by the so-called rural area which simply incorporates all types of settlements other than towns.

Rural sociology stands apart from general sociology not only, as in the case of most sociological sub-disciplines, in defining a specific group of institutions, communities or social processes. It also stands apart in defining a group of reciprocally dependent facts and social phenomena, appearing within a specific (rural) social and cultural development of the natural environment, assuming (as in the case of urban sociology) that specific forms of human contact have a significant influence on the process of socialization and the shape of the social structure. The second distinctive criterion determines the essence and singularity of rural sociology. Broadly speaking, this discipline is concerned with general social relations between people living in a village or other rural environment.

The proposed way of defining the area of rural sociology under research eradicates the problem of the loss of the analysis as a result of the disappearance of peasant communities. Linking the cognitive interests of rural sociology to the traditional rural community was justified as long as the majority of rural inhabitants were peasants. Nowadays, this is untrue even in countries where agriculture holds a relatively significant position such as Poland or France where peasants are replaced by agricultural workers or farmers. In addition, particularly in highly developed industrial societies,

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<sup>6</sup> L. Krzywicki, *Socjologia. Poradnik dla samouków (Sociology. A manual for the self-taught)*, Warsaw 1900.

<sup>7</sup> J. Szczepański, *Elementarne pojęcia socjologii (Elementary notions of sociology)*, Warsaw 1963.

a small and ever shrinking group of people, representing approximately 5% of the professionally active who often have to combine work in the field with another job are involved in agricultural production. The ever growing number of owners of so-called second houses who consider the country environment to be attractive for residential, yet not necessarily working purposes is an additional complication. This leads to considering the problems of former peasants — nowadays to a greater degree farmers or agricultural producers — as being an important, autonomous yet only a component part of the subject of modern-day rural sociology, which must now wholly deal with the social problems of the functioning of rural areas, inhabited by representatives of various socio-professional groups. The marginalization of the peasant class as well as agriculture as the only source of livelihood for rural inhabitants thus forces a reorientation of the subject of rural sociology, which can under no circumstance be considered as conducive to liquidation. It is rather proof of the strong ties with the changing rural reality, which continues to be different from urban reality and consequently requires specific theoretical perspectives.

### Theoretical perspectives

One of the more criticized aspects of rural sociology are its rather stiff theoretical ties with general sociology — which deals with the analysis of the conformity of the modes of development of urban society — and consequently feeling, at home within the sphere of the analysed discipline of the industrial-urban point of reference to problems of rural areas. For many decades this meant the indiscriminate adaptation of doctrines of modernization to explaining phenomena of social life,<sup>8</sup> which never had and still do not have urban characteristics, as well as not paying particular attention to the requirement which sometimes appears concerning the precise definition of the countryside.<sup>9</sup> Meanwhile, the question of specifying the differences between country and town (between the rural and urban area) seems to be fundamental in order to mark a framework for the discipline.

Doing the above is growing more difficult due to the standardization of living modes and conditions between the rural and the urban community as well as the equalization of their cultural potential. Under such circum-

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<sup>8</sup> See F. Kromka, *Cztery dekady zachodniemieckiej socjologii wsi i rolnictwa (Four decades of West German rural sociology and agriculture)*, [in:] *Socjologia wsi w Republice...*, pp. 35–38; W. Pevetz, *Trzydzieści lat socjologicznych badań wsi w Austrii (Thirty years of sociological research in Austria)*, [in:] *Socjologia wsi w Austrii*, ed. A. Kaleta, Toruń 1994, pp. 27–51.

<sup>9</sup> A. L. Bertrand, Z. T. Wierzbicki, *Socjologia wsi w Stanach Zjednoczonych. Stan i tendencje rozwojowe (Rural sociology in the United States. Present condition and development tendencies)*, Wrocław–Warszawa–Kraków 1970, p. 54.

stances demographic criteria determining whether a place is a village or town depending on size of population are no longer significant. Evaluations made from the perspective of the nature of settlement or resulting from the spacial, demographic, social, cultural and economic aspects of a local community or the agricultural (peasant) society are even less precise. The type of professional activity, social mobility, possibilities of individual development are ever worsening indicators of the differences between town and countryside.

It is, therefore, not surprising that reference is readily made to Georg Simmel's long-forgotten statements that people or groups living in particular areas define and interpret them and therefore have an influence on the area surrounding them.<sup>10</sup> While contemplating the concept of the rural area, the category of the identity of the environment comes to mind, expressing its significance for the inhabitants as well as the information and activity specificity by known aspects, due to which it is possible to function in that environment while being aware of the consequences of one's behaviour. Assuming — further to the canons of interpretative sociology — that each form of behaviour contains some logic, it is rational — even if it is impossible for the external observer to grasp immediately — that the rural area is above all a concrete social space where particular people function on a daily basis. These activities cannot be considered in a purely objective manner — as in more traditional ways of defining the countryside — since they become deprived of their own significance.

The problem of the rural characteristics of this significance remains unsolved. These were once connected with aspirations of self-sufficiency (subsistence), nowadays perhaps to a greater extent with notions about oneself on mutual terms with nature.

Finding a precise definition of rural areas is probably the first, yet not the only challenge for modern rural sociology which must quickly build the theoretical foundations for a development strategy of rural areas in a society which is fast becoming post-industrial.

Analyses of the economic past seem to mark a potential direction for research, undertaken to promote an understanding of current social changes, primarily by a critique of current industrial society. '...Keynes's conviction,' writes Roman Sandgruber, 'that almost all social problems can be solved by production growth, proved very successful immediately after the Second World War. However, later ecological, energy and raw material problems as well as the declining confidence in the potential of technology

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<sup>10</sup> G. Simmel, *Der Raum und die räumlichen Ordnungen der Gesellschaft*, [in:] *Soziologie*, Vol. II, Berlin 1958. See: A. Bodenstedt, *Wieś i tożsamość wiejska w społeczeństwie przemysłowym (The countryside and rural identity in industrial society)*, [in:] *Socjologia wsi w Republice...*

revealed the limits of growth. The order of things seems to be not only balancing production with energy consumption but also, generally speaking, a return to simpler forms of living.<sup>11</sup> For rural sociology pre-industrial (agricultural) societies can be an inspiring area for researching the circumstances which create models of those 'simpler forms of living.' Portrayed in the Weberian convention of the ideal type, they are characterized by something which could be described as a technological gathering point, economic congruency and transparency of social structures. The first of these characteristics results from using the energy of the sun, wind, water as well as plants, animals and people. There would, therefore, be no need to introduce additional exterior energy into the ecosystem which provides the possibility of functioning in a closed cycle. The second characteristic means a far reaching concurrence in the logic of production and the logic of need with the accepted primacy of the phenomenon of limitation over the phenomenon of consumption, and the third a relatively small number of communication parts and channels as well as a low standard of social division of labour.

Investigations concerning the essence of agrarian societies — undertaken not only from the perspectives here outlined,<sup>12</sup> carry important theoretical impulses and interesting methods of application. Both of these are reflected in modern concepts of revitalizing rural areas, assuming the need to diminish the excessive use of energy by agricultural ecosystems (ecological agriculture, biotechnologies). They have proved equally useful in research on the theoretical principles of the multifunctional development of rural areas. Its essence is the return to 'multi-professionalism' as a way of life for the rural family, consisting of combining various sources of income in order to 'cover expenses' which is of greater economic significance than 'the level of income.'<sup>13</sup> It so happened that the economic crisis affecting many present rural communities is the result of the collapse of a certain type of economic cycle (typical of agrarian communities, and eliminated by industrialization and the introduction of new sources of energy), whose essence was the financial self-sufficiency of the country-peasant population. This was the result of both a high level of refinery of raw materials and a multidirectional production for self-sufficiency as well as processing and marketing products of country origin, currently assumed as acquiring so-called added value.

<sup>11</sup> R. Sandgruber, *Standard życia w społeczeństwie rolniczym (The standard of living in rural society)*, [in:] *Socjologia wsi w Austrii*, p. 56.

<sup>12</sup> More about this in: A. Kaleta, *Rewitalizacja obszarów rustykalnych Europy (The revitalization of rural areas in Europe)*, Vol. 1: *Spółeczność wiejska*, Wrocław—Warszawa—Kraków 1996, pp. 15–21.

<sup>13</sup> W. Pevetz, *Nowe drogi wielozawodowości wiejskiej (New directions in rural multi-professionalism)*, [in:] *Socjologia wsi w Austrii*, pp. 147–159.

Without getting involved in the essence of the matter, it can be stated that rural sociology achieved its greatest academic successes and highest social recognition (Poland in the thirties, the United States in the fifties and sixties) when it skilfully combined both a high standard of theoretical investigation with applied assignments. H. Kaufman seems to be quite right when discussing this problem. According to him, one of the greatest obstacles in the correct application of rural sociology is the lack of effective integration between the roles of the theoretical research worker and the sociologist carrying out practical investigations.<sup>17</sup> In other words, applied sociology separated from fundamental theoretical investigations soon stops being sociology (science), while sociological theory separated from practice stops having much significance. If such is the case, attention should be concentrated on the social functions of rural sociology. J. H. Coop prepared a specification of these in the sixties.<sup>18</sup> His hypothesis remains astoundingly topical which does not necessarily speak well for the efficiency of our discipline in searching solutions to the problems of the rural environment.

As a priority Coop placed enlightenment of the urban population of the importance of current changes in the countryside at the very foundations of the social assignments of rural sociology. Equally important in his view was the dissemination of reliably documented information about the real living ways and conditions of rural inhabitants as well as the correction of frequent prejudice in this regard. Since even a cursory observation of the current situation proves that the condition of the so-called general knowledge of rural and agricultural matters is undergoing serious deterioration, there are no reasons for disagreeing with Coop on this issue. It can be stated sarcastically that the last few dozen years of development of rural sociology, fascinated with the idea of modernization, have led to the identification in the social awareness of the development of culture and civilization with the city as well as viewing 'rurality,' above all from the point of view of the city, considered to be something better. As a result of such a distorted social perception, there is a widely expressed judgement — not only by the average man in the street but also, which is worse, in political and journalistic circles — about the catastrophically organized and expensive Polish agricultural production; the backwardness, greed and resistance to change of the Polish farmer; the Polish countryside as an economic and cultural ballast for the process of transformation. It is not the intention of this paper to argue that the majority of such views is in fact false and

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<sup>17</sup> H. F. Kaufman, *A Perspective for Rural Sociology*, *Rural Sociology*, March 1963, pp. 4–5. This is referred to by A. L. Bertrand, Z. T. Wierzbicki, *Sociologia...*, p. 55.

<sup>18</sup> J. H. Coop *Our Changing Rural Society. Perspectives and Trends*, Ames—Iowa 1964.

the achievements of Florian Znaniecki, Józef Chałasiński and Kazimiera Zawistowicz-Adamska who best showed the way of defining the subjective dimensions and meaning of a specific rural community.<sup>16</sup> The continuation of such traditions requires theoretical references to culture as it is broadly understood, which indicate the need to elicit a development strategy for rural areas not only from new organizational solutions and complicated technologies but also from the spiritual aspects of life, generally understood as cultural identity. Since people need a sense of identity, in other words conformity between what they are currently experiencing with what has gone by and has been recorded in individual or group memory, rural sociology must see to the problem of reinforcing or generating the cultural identity of local (rural, small-village) communities. This cannot be anything like either 'ethnographization' or the artificial prevention of civilizational processes. These processes should be understood as part of the modernization of rural areas, the improvement of conditions and quality of life of the inhabitants and not as 'becoming like a town.' Only identity shaped in this way can be an effective tool for overcoming the antinomy between tradition and progress, appeasing the conflict which has for decades coexisted with the development processes of rural areas and is based on urban criteria. It can be useful in extracting and appraising the self-development aspects, tearing the countryside away from the urban criteria of backwardness and modernization, rejecting the processes of a typically urban lifestyle.

Tracing a theoretical outline for the modern development of rural sociology as a discipline organizing the academic background for the restoration processes of rural areas also requires the consideration of so-called cognitive priorities.

In this context it would be advisable to pay particular attention to the ambivalence in modern lifestyle of the rural population, which is suspended between traditional 'rurality' and the urbanized 'neither country nor town culture,' between the former mentality, reflecting the normative order of the rural community and the present 'rurality,' symbolizing an allegiance to many different social structures and value systems. Changes in the socio-cultural aspect of the countryside require particular attention due to the industrialization of the processes of agricultural production, causing the disappearance of the 'old' and the formation of new rural housing estates, associated with the satisfaction of the living needs of a commuting population or providing services to tourism.

By understanding the cognitive priorities as ways of getting to know reality, serious consideration must be given to the frequent cases against the further domination of questionnaire and quantitative procedures, which

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<sup>16</sup> K. Zawistowicz-Adamska, *Spółeczność wiejska (Rural community)*, Warsaw 1958.



do not belong to Polish sociological tradition and are hardly useful in the research of rural communities.

A broader utilization of the methods of the above-mentioned interpretative sociology, consisting of 'open' discussions with people as a basis of getting to know the correct ways of observing and interpreting reality surrounding them as well as an analysis, typology and evaluation of the contents of the responses while applying the rules of academic hermeneutics can lead to a certain turning point, important not only as regards the theoretical development of the discipline but also for practical work.

### **Social practice**

The social practice of rural sociology — usually identified with its social roles or duties — is the subject of constant controversy.

One party believes that real science steers reality by means of applied science, while itself preferring pure study as well as methodological and theoretical correctness. From this point of view, rural sociology could acquire the status of a basic academic science, if it were to restrict itself to clarifying rural reality as it now stands, leaving the interference in the course of analysed processes and phenomena to applied disciplines (agrarian policy, education, social planning etc.) Since it does not want to, or worse, it does not know how to do this for reasons already mentioned, linking its research duties mainly with the preparation of academically documented circumstances to the programming of the development of rural areas, it should be located within the field of so-called applied sociologies. This does not necessarily mean the disrespect of its theoretical achievement, particularly in the field of research about issues of adaptation and diffusion, which have contributed to the progress in general sociology and related disciplines (social psychology, socio-economics, political science). It is rather a question of emphasizing its practical direction as a kind of social engineering reacting to rural communities.

The other party indicates a need of getting to know social reality for its systematic, longterm reformation, which means that the science should harmoniously include theoretical and practical functions. The same applies to rural sociology, which is frequently accused of insufficient involvement in controlling social changes by the inhabitants of rural areas, politicians and planners. The first group, represented by its most active members, demands reasons for supporting efforts to improve conditions of rural life and work. The second group is more interested in the investigation of the current state and forecast of the development of the situation, enabling a rational solution to problems and foreseeing the social consequences of either planned or implemented ventures, particularly in the light of the forthcoming integration with the European Union.

Theoretical inspirations of rural sociology can only rely on tradition to a certain extent. Equally interesting circumstances result from the forecast for the future clearly showing that civilization is currently at a stage of development which can be defined as the passage from an industrial to an information society. In other words, from a society whose standard of living was based on the growing production of material goods to a society where almost everything depends on quick access and making use of information. The landslide progress of new information technologies as well as the engagement of enormous funds and intellectual potential in looking for new areas of practical application (telematics)<sup>14</sup> leave no doubt that within a few years these predictions will come true.

Without considering opportunities created by new forms of communication, rural sociologists will have difficulty getting fully involved in the construction of a development strategy for rural areas. Providing the inhabitants with modern information systems removes the problem of having to accept limitations to many aspects of daily life, caused by physical distance. Modern teleinformation media allow the construction of a network of unlimited contacts between people with varied knowledge and skills, regardless of their location. They also allow the regeneration of the socio-economic fabric of the village by creating real possibilities of a far-reaching decentralization of many kinds of economic activity, freeing different kinds of professional activity from the tight large city infrastructure and multiplying the marketing possibilities of farms, craft shops, small businesses, banks, insurance and consulting companies etc. There is a unique opportunity of restoring a certain self-sufficiency, independence and even some forms of isolation to local communities while by-passing the inconveniences resulting from such a situation, in the form of so-called civilizational delay or a need to search for individual opportunities by migrating to big cities.

The search for adequate theories which would define and order the complicated reality of rural areas is in harmony with the anti-scientific re-orientation in research, anchored in the internal changes in social science, their methodological assumptions and research methods. These largely strive towards an interdisciplinary point of view and leading of epistemological reflection in the direction of societies maintaining the basic characteristics of a group and the direct experience in the relationship: man versus the environment, man versus man.<sup>15</sup> This is a more or less conscious reference to the tradition of so-called humanistic sociology ever-present in the experience of Polish rural sociology during the interwar period, marked by

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<sup>14</sup> An academic discipline concerned with the possibilities of using teleinformation media in practice, including rural areas.

<sup>15</sup> M. Wieruszewska, *Wieś w poszukiwaniu całości społeczno-kulturowej* (*The countryside in search of a socio-cultural entity*), Warsaw 1991, p. 50.

proves the disgraceful ignorance of their authors. However, in this context, the responsibility of rural sociology seems clearer, providing reliable information required in order to correct erroneous social consciousness.

Providing sensible information is connected with functions of rural sociology referring to the socio-economic activity of rural areas and relying on assisting political decisions made with a view to solving economic and social problems of the inhabitants, forty years ago identified with the growing number of old people, the lack of jobs, a decrease in income, a deterioration in living conditions and severe youth migration. There is no reason to disavow the accuracy of the expressed recommendations since none of the mentioned issues has so far been solved. New ones have arisen, such as the need to reconcile economic interest with the requirements of environmental protection.

This final matter is connected with another task of rural sociology (it was not included in Coop's specification for obvious reasons) appearing as a result of the rising ecological awareness of the inhabitants of rural areas. The academic assistance of such activities at a glance only seems connected with the protection of natural resources of rural areas, representing approximately 80% of the earth's surface. In fact, it is of equal significance for their economic and cultural development, which directly draws our attention to the question of the promotion of ecological agriculture. Modern technology applied in industrial agriculture provides a great quantity of agricultural products, which gives rise to the problem of overproduction, but of inferior quality and taste. With the ever-growing consumer awareness, particularly sensitive to health hazards resulting from the use of artificial fertilizers and chemicals for the protection of plants, and accelerating the growth of breeding animals, it is increasingly difficult to put them on a market whose demands for healthy and tasty products are growing. Consequently, the development of this kind of agriculture which is compatible with the requirements of environmental protection as well as being the provider of food with adequate biological parameters, raises the profitability of agricultural production which in turn provides a chance of improving the rural economy. The development of ecological agriculture may also provide rural areas with many social and cultural advantages. The former are connected with counteracting depopulation in the countryside by creating employment on farms and with the improvement of the health of the community, resulting from the improvement of the state of the natural environment and the quality of agricultural consumer products. The latter are connected with the encouragement of local activity, aimed at reviving the cultural traditions of the peasantry, which may strengthen the processes of rebuilding rural identity, lost as a result of the modernization process.

Although the necessity of indicating the threats to the socio-cultural development of the countryside comes third on the list of priorities in Coop's

analysis, not much has in fact been done in this field. It is difficult to put the blame for such a situation on a theory, which seems elaborate enough as far as this particular problem is concerned in rural sociology both at international and Polish level. However, the mechanisms of moving from the academic sphere requirements to the sphere of social practice, never served at a level similar to the problems of diffusion of agricultural innovation. Consequently, we now have a wide knowledge of the dangers of replacing folk culture by mass culture as regards social life in the country, yet we do not know how to counteract this phenomenon.

The last social function of rural sociology recommended gathering experience from the process of modernization in the rural communities of industrial countries so as to use them in stimulating the development of rural regions in less developed countries. Referring to this point in hindsight, it is unfortunate that many rural sociologists, particularly those in the United States and Western Europe, concentrated their efforts on achieving this task, frequently neglecting domestic matters. A result of this involvement, the indiscriminate transfer of experience, particularly the export of industrial agrarian technology, is — according to a growing number of people<sup>19</sup> — the destruction of natural agriculture, and consequently of the rural areas of Asia, Africa and South America. Although not highly productive, this agriculture is self-sufficient as regards energy and capital, and is an employment provider to millions of people now roaming the outskirts of cities, waiting for the mercy of foreign food aid. Under no circumstance does this negate the responsibility of exchanging international experience in the social practice of rural sociology. Such exchange and cooperation should, however, take into account the respect of the local and regional autonomy of rural areas and, above all, be a safeguard against repeating mistakes made by others.

### Conclusion

It is a truism that the possibility of developing the theory and putting into practice the aims of rural sociology depends on the standard of its institutionalization and the systematic intake of young academic staff.

I believe that the first issue should not raise concern since there are several academic institutions in Poland which treat rural sociology seriously.<sup>20</sup> In addition, there are considerable opportunities of publishing research

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<sup>19</sup> See H. Schoek, *Die 12 Irrtümer unseres Jahrhunderts*, München–Berlin 1986, p. 363.

<sup>20</sup> These are rural sociology teams working within the Institute of Rural and Agricultural Development at the Polish Academy of Science as well as Institutes of Sociology at the following Universities: Jagiellonian, Łódź, Marie Skłodowska-Curie and Nicolaus Copernicus.

results both in specialist periodicals at national ('Rural Sociology Annuals' *Roczniki Socjologii Wsi*, 'The Countryside and Agriculture' *Wieś i Rolnictwo*, 'The Countryside and the State' *Wieś i Państwo*) and international level ('Eastern European Countryside') as well as in publishing houses.<sup>21</sup>

The second issue which is directly connected with the teaching of our discipline, is far more worrying. In spite of an excellent tradition, for many reasons, one of which were certainly doctrinal restrictions and another, the serious shortage of teaching staff, rural sociology was rarely taught within the context of agricultural studies during the period of the Polish Peoples' Republic. From the late fifties, some universities (Warsaw, Kraków, Łódź, The Catholic University in Lublin) provided the possibility of specializing in rural sociology (as well as other sub-disciplines of sociology) as part of general sociology. However, the demand for specialists capable of lecturing in this discipline at agricultural colleges was only partly satisfied. A breakthrough occurred at the beginning of the eighties, with the appearance on the map of academic institutions specializing in rural sociology of the Sociological Institute at Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń. In 1983 it provided postgraduate sociological studies, and in 1989 the possibility of specializing in 'Rural and Agricultural Sociology' and thereby obtaining a Master's Degree in Sociology.

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<sup>21</sup> It is worth paying particular attention to two series: 'Problemy Rozwoju Wsi i Rolnictwa' ('The Problems of Rural Development and Agriculture,' published by the Institute of Rural Development and Agriculture, Polish Academy of Science) and 'Socjologia i socjologowie' ('Sociology and Sociologists,' published by the Institute of Sociology at Nicolaus Copernicus University, Toruń).