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The Institute of Rural and Agricultural Development, Polish Academy of Sciences

The Institute of Rural and Agricultural Development is in Department I of the Polish Academy of Sciences, i.e. in the Department of Social Science. This is an interdisciplinary unit, yet all its disciplines belong to the social sciences, research topics undertaken are connected with that branch of science and its members include economists, demographers, rural sociologists, educational sociologists, economic geographers, ethnographers etc. The Polish countryside is the topic which cements the Institute. Agriculture, appearing in the Institute's name, has a leading – yet not unique – economic role in the countryside, but it is losing significance. The agricultural nature of the Polish countryside, even when agriculture itself loses its dominant role, will have an influence on the social image of the countryside, its inhabitants' behaviour and views. From the social point of view leaving 'agriculture' in the institute's name will for long be justified.

The names of most – yet not all – of the academic units in the Polish Academy of Sciences contain academic disciplines. The Institute of Rural and Agricultural Development belongs to those designed to concentrate on particularly important research topics, the analysis of which would be insufficient within one discipline.¹ The Institute is small, employing twenty nine academics and has a significant role integrating academics dealing with the countryside, employed in other research institutes and universities. No academic institutions in Poland other than the Institute of Rural and Agricultural Development deal with the countryside in an interdisciplinary way as a social and economic environment, although this subject appears in the works of individuals or teams outside the Institute. The headquarters of

¹ E.g.: the Art Institute and the Centre of Cosmic Research are part of the structure of the Polish Academy of Sciences, whereas the Mother and Child Institute is outside its structure. Such institutes, also designed for the importance of their research, are interdisciplinary.

the Institute² lies in the centre of Warsaw, in a historical building which has been linked with education and science for over 200 years. Some of the Institute's employees live in other towns and that is where they carry out their research (in Toruń, Kraków and Opole).

The Institute's monthly seminars are an opportunity for meetings and discussions between academics employed by the Institute and others interested in this subject, yet not formally linked with the Institute. Papers get presented by both Institute staff and others researching rural issues. Information concerning meeting dates and topics is published in the press. It is worth underlining that Institute staff are generally in the minority and, depending on the topic of the meeting, people interested come from all over Poland. Discussions are lively, rarely ending on time and are an opportunity for the exchange of ideas, sometimes giving rise to new research ventures, contacts and cooperation between members of different centres.

The Institute's integrating role for the academic environment interested in rural issues is not limited to seminars. The Institute publishes a quarterly *Wieś i Rolnictwo* (The Village and Agriculture) and a book series *Problemy Rozwoju Wsi i Rolnictwa* (Problems of Rural Development and Agriculture). Conferences about the most important rural and agricultural issues take place a few times a year. Lecturers from all the academic centres in Poland as well as foreign guests get invited. Recent conferences included: *Wieś i rolnictwo – perspektywy rozwoju* (The village and agriculture – development prospects) and *Kształtujący się post-transformacyjny model wsi i rolnictwa w Polsce: tendencje, perspektywy, opcje polityki* (The emergence of a post-transformation model of the village and agriculture in Poland: tendencies, prospects, political options). A Polish-Chinese conference called 'Selected Problems of Villages and Agriculture during the Market Reorientation of the Economy' is planned in 2003 as well as a Polish conference devoted to the problems of self-government in local communities.

The quarterly which has been published for over 25 years by the Academic Research Committee is listed in the highest category (A) of academic periodicals in Poland and the Institute hopes to get it on to the Philadelphia list. The quarterly's columns are open to texts from all over Poland; the decision about getting a text printed is made in accordance with the quarterly's profile and the critics' evaluation. Articles by foreign authors often appear. Approximately every two years there is a special issue in English including a choice of the best materials covering that period.

² The official address of the Institute of Rural and Agricultural Development, Polish Academy of Sciences is: ul. Nowy Świat 72 in Warsaw. However, if you ask anyone in Warsaw for the way to *Pałac Staszica* (Staszic Palace) you will automatically be directed to that address. The building dates back to the XVIII century when it was the headquarters of the National Education Committee, the first institution to have the role of Ministry of Education and Science.

The book series is designed to publish works produced by the Institute, yet in some cases works by authors employed elsewhere also appear. 6–8 books have come out annually in recent years, distributed by selected academic bookshops and available at the Institute. Although these are highly specialised items, editions tend to sell out within one or two years.

The Institute of Rural and Agricultural Development is primarily a research unit, carrying out its own research programme as well as numerous topics covered by grants. Its small, exceptionally dynamic academic staff, consisting of 9 professors, 5 assistant professors, 9 doctors and 6 assistants, deal with several key socio-economic problems in the countryside. The Institute conducts studies on the multifunctional development of rural areas, the rural employment market, local government, entrepreneurship, the role of leaders in community life and civil institutions in the activation of the countryside, social and economic discrimination, conditions of restructuring, organisation of local communities, educational problems etc. Research is also conducted on the cultural heritage of the countryside, changes in social awareness and the development of community spirit. These are issues of such importance that it is not surprising that it is rare for grant applications from the Institute not to get highly evaluated or rejected in competitions. The Institute annually conducts 10–12 topics on average which are covered by grants. Within the Institute there is also a Polish part of the international research project including 5 European countries, financed by the European Commission within the framework of the Fifth programme (The role of small and average towns in the development of rural areas). The research activity of the Institute is confirmed by the ranking of the Academic Research Committee in the highest category 'I'.

The Institute keeps regular contact with many foreign research centres, including the Institute of Rural Development of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, the Universities of Plymouth and Exeter, the National Centre of Academic Research in Paris, the Institute of Economics of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, the Institute of International Economic and Political Sciences of the Russian Academy of Science, the Institute of Agricultural Economics in Vilnius. A prestigious monthly published by the British Academy³ issued a text on the Institute's cooperation with centres in England, describing it as an exemplary model of academic cooperation.

The Institute's high position among research centres has led to its staff's frequent invitations to advisory bodies and various consultancies, as well as preparing expert reports for Polish and international institutions. Many foreign academics and business people visit the Institute every year. These visits often lead to further cooperation.

³ The National Academy for the Humanities and Social Sciences Review, January–July 2001.

The subject matter dealt with by the Institute is reflected by its structure. Professor Marek Kłodziński is its current director and Professor Andrzej Rosner the deputy director. The Academic Board, 50% of whose members are not formally linked with the Institute, is headed by Professor Bogdan Klepacki, an economist working at the School of Rural Management in Warsaw. The Institute consists of the following sections: the department of European Integration (headed by Professor Jerzy Wilkin), the department of Socio-economic Activation of Rural Areas (headed by Professor Leszek Klank), the department of Sociology and Rural Culture Anthropology (Professor Izabela Bukraba-Rylska), the Sociology of Education and Rural Youth (Professor Krystyna Szafraniec) and the team Monitoring the Spatial Differentiation of Rural Areas (Professor Andrzej Rosner). A procedure followed by the Institute is the creation of teams concentrating research workers (sometimes from outside the Institute) for the realisation of specific research projects. Formal attachment to a particular unit in the Institute is irrelevant in the creation of these teams.

In such brief information about the Institute it is difficult to mention or characterise the most important research results, as regards merit, which have been carried out. That is why I shall not go further than presenting some titles of books which have recently been published. They show both the variety of projects realised by the Institute and their interdisciplinary quality.

- Tryfan, B., *Zabezpieczenia społeczne rolników w Europie* (The social protection of farmers in Europe). Warszawa 2000.
- Kłodziński, M., Fedyszak-Radziejowska, B. (ed.), *Przedsiębiorczość wiejska w Polsce i krajach Unii Europejskiej* (Rural entrepreneurship in Poland and in countries of the European Union). Warszawa 2002.
- Rynki wiejskie: Ziemia, praca, kapitał* (Rural markets: Land, Work, Capital) Collective work. Warszawa 2001 (Expert reports commissioned by the World Bank).
- Rosner, A. (ed.), *Wiejskie obszary kumulacji barier rozwojowych* (Rural areas cumulating development barriers). Warszawa 2002.
- Wieruszewska, M., *Samoorganizacja w społecznościach wiejskich. Przejawy – struktury – zróżnicowania* (Autonomy in rural communities. Symptoms – structures – differences). Warszawa 2002.
- Frenkel, I., Rosner, A. (ed.), *Atlas demograficzny i społeczno-gospodarczy obszarów wiejskich w Polsce* (Demographic and socio-economic atlas of rural areas in Poland). Warszawa 1995.
- Halamska, M., *Dekolektywizacja rolnictwa w Europie Środkowej i jej społeczne konsekwencje* (Agricultural decollectivisation in Central Europe and its social consequences). Warszawa 1998.
- Hunek, T. (ed.), *Dylematy polityki rolnej. Integracja polskiej wsi z rolnictwem UE* (The dilemmas of agricultural policy. The integration of the Polish countryside with EU agriculture). Warszawa 2000.

Kłodziński, M., Rosner, A. (ed.), *Rozwój przedsiębiorczości na terenach wiejskich wschodniego i zachodniego pogranicza* (The development of entrepreneurship in rural areas of the eastern and western borderland) Warszawa 2001.

The period of economic transformation in Poland was very hard for many academic centres. The principles of financing academic research changed, institutes gained greater independence but demands became high. Rivalry for financing research by grant competitions became a challenge for which many academic centres were unprepared. The Institute of Rural and Agricultural Development was restructured, emphasis being placed on the development of the most important subject at a given time, and often omitted by other academic centres. Placing the Institute within the structure of the Polish Academy of Sciences allowed it to maintain essential independence from state bodies realising economic policy, which reinforced the position of the Institute as an independent expert entity. These solutions were successful. The Institute's current high position on the academic market allows for development, investment in academic staff. Evidence of this is the recent employment of four promising young assistants, who should finish their doctorates within a few years and actively join in the research process.