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## INTRODUCTION TO THE 10<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY OF EASTERN EUROPEAN COUNTRYSIDE

The idea of initiating an academic periodical, which was to deal with changes taking place in the Central and East European countryside and agriculture came into being at the beginning of the 1990s among a group of sociologists, representing various countries and regions of our continent and who had been meeting for years at congresses and seminars of the European Society for Rural Sociology. The necessity of creating such a periodical resulted from the fact that nothing of the kind existed on the market: academic periodicals dealing with rural social or economic issues, permeate far wider areas of Europe or the world and can, therefore, evidently not pay much attention to one particular region. Also the fact that we decided to throw some light on changes in the legal, organisational, economic, demographic and socio-cultural domains – a clearly interdisciplinary character of the periodical – was rather exceptional. Finally, it was crucial for us to provide access to our readers – in an international language – to results of academic activity largely published in national languages and thus, regardless of their exceptional value, not entering international circulation. Brief English summaries did not solve the problem. In order to gain access you had to get hold of the book or periodical published in Hungarian, Polish or Bulgarian! An important aspect of this part of our programme was e.g. the cycle devoted to the founders of rural sociology in our region, often unknown in the rest of the world (such as Gusti, Grabski, Bláha, Bogišić, Górski, Hruszewski).

Recent years have, of course, brought fundamental change as regards access to academic publications due to the dissemination of the English language and internet. However, the possibility of finding over a dozen texts dealing with Central and East European countryside in one publication is not losing attraction, judging by our readers' interest.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The readership of our journal whose circulation is 350 copies is relatively wide. It is generally distributed by sales organised by the Academic Bookshop, Nicolaus Copernicus University and two other enterprises. Copies of EEC are sent to all of Poland's university libraries. Further copies are diffused as part of an exchange carried out by the Main Library of Nicolaus Copernicus University

A publisher was soon found – Nicolaus Copernicus University and a sponsor – one of the EU funds, an editorial board was created and a set of articles gathered for the publication of the first issue of *Eastern European Countryside*.

The same procedure for finding materials has been used from the beginning. Due to our limited budget we cannot pay authors' fees. We can, therefore, not expect them to produce materials specially for us (although there are exceptions). In the sections "Articles and Studies" and "Research Reports and Materials" of each issue we rely on two sources: papers presented at various international academic meetings and translations of texts published in national languages (we do not publish articles which have already appeared elsewhere in English). In many cases authors devote considerable work to adapting, shortening, completing or explaining matters which are evident to the readers of one particular country yet hard for others to understand. The "Reviews and Information" section requires more work since it consists of texts specially requested by the editorial board. They are generally written by people who have been connected with our periodical for years and are the authors of important articles and studies.

The current issue is no.10, our jubilee issue. In fact it is no. 11 since in 1993 we published an unnumbered introductory issue, now considered as no. 0 (and that is how we refer to articles printed in it, containing a list of authors and articles at the end of this issue).

No. 0 contained a short declaration by the editorial team, referring to the subject matter we intended to present. This included: the situation in the countryside and agriculture in Central and East European countries before the beginning of the system changes in 1990; the nature of these changes; mechanisms governing them and visions, predictions and expectations for the future. These expectations concerned the guarantee that production of large amounts of cheap food should not take place *at the cost of widespread change to the landscape, loss of wildlife, pollution and urbanisation. To prevent this, a new "philosophy of rurality" must be created to serve the rural population well-being and to protect their heritage.*

No. 0 comprised articles portraying the region's problems as a whole (Giordano, Eberhardt, Swain, Barbić) at the beginning of the transformation process as well as those of specific countries (Czech Republic, Romania, Estonia, Bulgaria, Poland) and also empirical analyses and theoretical considerations on the activities of academic circles – sociologists, economists, social anthropologists (Kaleta, Kostova). These two main research areas – the presentation and analysis of the real state of affairs and the activities of specific academic disciplines have consistently been carried out by us for 10 years.

Starting from issue no. 1, published in 1995, we largely concentrated on, firstly – the presentation of legislative activities connected with landownership (pri-

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and the editorial board (International Rural Sociology Association and sociological periodicals on a similar subject matter).

vatisation, reprivatisation and other agriculture-related reforms), secondly – pointing out changes in rural areas connected with the development of the market economy, and thirdly – changes on the job market.

And immediately, in issue no. 1, alongside the account on legislative solutions and organisational activities texts appeared containing unexpected and generally uncalled for social consequences affecting not individual people yet entire diverse groups among the rural population. Some titles of the texts even mention this: “Social Costs of Transformation in Czech Agriculture” (Hudečková-Lošťák), “Reprivatisation without Peasants” (Kostova-Giordano). In other articles, regardless of their titles, topics appear more and more often which we had previously not predicted: the unjust division of landownership, marginalisation of certain social groups, growing differentiation in farmers’ incomes, and above all – employment problems, unemployment. This topic was presented in a block of articles in issue no. 2 (Swain, Borowicz, Kovách, Markova) and all subsequent issues comprise further studies on this topic and information as well as predictions regarding the future and considerations on solutions to these problems.

The content of the periodical does not only concentrate on the negative social consequences of transformation. Much attention has been devoted to the formation of new types of production and ownership, including the economic and organisational point of view, the formation of frequently appearing farm dualism – commercial and subsistent style agriculture – its participation in global agricultural production, new organisation of production, growth of productivity etc. The observation of processes taking place in small scale farming is particularly important – small farms or household plots and their role in shaping the income situation of rural households (beside the growing role of non-earned sources of income – social benefits) and changes inside farming families (the changing roles of women and men etc.). Alongside there are new large-scale farms, which belong to (or are leased by) entrepreneurs deriving from the former administrators of collective farms. These farms have few employees and are often involved in non-agricultural activity (Slovakia, Poland, Bulgaria and, in fact, all the countries in the region).

A new problem area is – starting from issue no. 4 (K. Szafraniec – “Polish Peasants – between Real Socialism and Real Capitalism”) – the state of awareness of rural inhabitants, emerging both in opinion polls and in the above-mentioned article by K. Szafraniec, as well as in spontaneous behaviour (K. Kovacs: “The 1997 Peasant Revolt in Hungary”, no. 5, V. Volguine: “Resentment to Capitalism”, no. 7, or Foryś-Gorlach: “Polish Peasant Protest under Post-Communism” no. 8).

These and other articles reveal the historical-cultural barriers of processes of adaptation of peasant milieus to new economic conditions – unnoticed barriers or totally ignored by politicians when deciding about a new system in these coun-

tries, particularly with reference to the countryside and agriculture. These are not simple issues. On the one hand, collectivisation and nationalisation of farms imposed from above during Stalinist times was accompanied by widespread brutality and the drama of thousands, even millions of people, and these dramas have been mentioned in many articles devoted to the global way of looking at the transformation processes. On the other – due to the traditions of collective land utilisation by peasants in some countries, (e.g. Russia, Bulgaria) collectivisation was more acceptable there than in countries such as Poland or Yugoslavia, where it did not take place in the face of fundamental rural resistance. Decisions concerning the shape of the agricultural economy when returning to the market economy were also made from above. No country saw a spontaneous drive to restore peasant ownership. Politicians representing the countryside, parliamentarians and lawyers took part in the decision making process and, of course, changes took place without the use of violence (Alanen, Karwacki – no. 8). And yet a considerable portion of rural inhabitants felt profoundly harmed. Firstly, because many of them were totally unprepared for running their farms independently, which requires complex and varied qualifications. Secondly, since (with the exception of the dramatic early days) the system of collectivised agriculture brought various advantages such as guaranteed, monthly incomes, however small, and additional material advantages in social organisation – social welfare, medical care, cultural participation by connecting patrimonialism and egalitarianism in the administration of collective farming (see Alanen, no. 8). Thirdly – since many consider, not without cause, that privatisation took place unjustly.

This feeling of harm is all the more painful since under democratic conditions – as opposed to Stalinist times – people may complain and protest without being punished – only that this generally happens in vain. At the same time and often – without independently attempting to change their lot. The texts document the processes of marginalisation, exclusion, growing poverty, income becoming limited to unearned sources (mainly social benefits) and the passive expectation that the state will solve all problems and will ensure everyone a reasonable standard of living.

This does not mean that there are not many articles describing various examples of entrepreneurship, individual local or regional initiatives (e.g. in Hungary, no. 8). This is to a certain extent connected with 8 countries from our region entering the EU this year – the Union where CAP plays such a significant role and so much money is allocated for the development of rural areas. The authors highlight complicated socio-economic processes (Cartwright-Swain, no. 9) or local government activities (Nagy Kalamász, no. 9) connected with this. Unfortunately there have been few such texts.

It can easily be noticed that in comparison with the first declaration made by the team in nr. 0 there has been a change: the most important cause for concern

has not turned out to be the threat to the natural environment (although it continues to exist and is a serious problem), but the problems of individuals and groups of people living in the country and connected with agriculture. Although the creators of the periodical have for years been interested in rural issues, they were not at first aware of the directions and significance of consequences of the transformation taking place in our region. But, regardless of the initial declarations, knowledge about them soon entered our columns.

The number of articles describing the experience of specific countries is definitely unequal and, therefore, unsatisfactory. Responsibility for this state of affairs lies not only with the editorial team – it also depends on the activeness of academic circles. There is a similar situation as regards the social problems of environmental protection – the attitudes and behaviour of rural inhabitants in this regard. We have not noticed success here. We have not managed to reach appropriate empirical research (with the exception of Poland, no. 8) This may have been caused by the low amount of research concerning the ecological awareness and behaviour of farmers.

The situation as regards organic/ecological farming is similar (no. 9).

When observing the evolution of problem areas covered in the 10 issues of *Eastern European Countryside*, we can confirm a well-known fact that we are faced with a turbulent and very fast process of important social change. Published statistical data now and then reveal highly significant changes at intervals of just a few years. The fact that our periodical appears once a year, and data analysed in it cannot always be entirely up to date, does not make it easy to keep up with changes which have taken place during the last dozen or so years. If, despite these difficulties, it so happens that in the eyes of our readers we do manage to keep pace with these changes, this is possible due to the existence of many admirable academic centres as well as the work of discerning academics, i.e. our authors. We would like to express our deep gratitude to them and look forward to further cooperation.