

Report on European Events devoted to Rural Sociology in 2005

The **XXI Congress European Society for Rural Sociology** took place in Keszthely, Hungary in August 2005 covering a few main issues connected with the economic, cultural, social and environmental development of rural areas. Change, continuity, diversity and cohesion were the topics discussed.

One of the main issues concerned the condition of rural areas in the European Union. In this context researchers tried to answer the question of the importance of the on-going process of agricultural restructuring determined by EU policies. The participants had the opportunity of hearing about cases in the U.K., Italy, Romania, Lithuania, Scotland, Hungary, Greece and other countries. A comparison was made in three European countries (U.K., Italy and Romania). Grete Rusten from Norway examined motivations of bringing technical knowledge and business awareness of the web into firms while László Osváth discussed the problem of the transformation of the telecottages.

The next issue was multifunctionality and rural development in the perspective of the construction of a new approach to the agricultural sector. The role played by agriculture in society was directly brought out of the concept of multifunctional agriculture as in the case of the Alpine countries, Greece, Poland or Hungary.

The speakers did also mention the conservation of genetic resources of Russian farm animals, the role of home gardens and landraces in promoting multifunctional agriculture and the industrialisation of tree harvesting. Reporters discussed integrated rural policy on the one hand, and the disintegration process on the other – trying to find the reason for policy failure. The role of public opinion and government was also emphasised. There was a debate on agro-biotech issues and the scientists tried to show the possibility of regional integration through biotechnology.

Alan Greer's report which answered the question 'how common is agricultural policy in Europe?' became a summary of this topic. He started with the core assumption that policies for rural society and agriculture in Europe are highly differentiated, both within and across countries. He emphasised the role of national governments in the policy process.

Sustainable development was the next topic. The discussion was devoted not only to sustainable development but also environmental sociology and ecological modernisation. Pekka Jokinen, Maria Järvelä and Antti Puupponem dealt with the question 'how does ecological modernisation define rural productions and rural-environmental governance?' In this context social capital, citizen participation and economic growth in rural areas was discussed. The speakers mentioned the problem of lack of entrepreneurship and decreasing interest in voluntary activities in rural communities. The lack of balance in age structure of the population in terms of reproduction capacity and labour resources was also discussed.

Rural sociology also held an important position at the **7th Conference of European Sociological Association** organised by the Institute of Sociology at Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń, Poland although that conference was not directly devoted to rural sociology. A research team addressed a wide area, from rural communities to noticeable inequalities (e.g. property, access, entitlements, gender etc.). Case studies were devoted to specific countries – Russia after 1991, Zimbabwe, Poland and Austria.

Reporters also dealt with the problem of changing life regarding kinship, friendship and social exchange. Berit Brandth and Marit S. Haugen presented a study on change and stability in the unequal discursive constructions of men's and women's practices.

While the 7th Conference of the European Sociological Association was taking place there were two additional events directly related to the rural sociology issue: the X Autumn School and the Rural Property Network-Workshop.

The X Autumn School was organised for PhD students and young researchers in the field of rural studies and the Rural Property Network Workshop in Poland. This event took place 14–21.09.2005 at Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń. The topic 'Theories and Practices of Rural Research' included the following issues: social capital, rural identity, sustainable development and new forms of agricultural activity.

The participants had the opportunity to listen to some of the results of the socio-anthropological investigation made by Elena A. Bogdanowa concerning the question on potential change of the habitation and economy in perspective of rural people.

In September 2005 we also had a **Rural Property Network Workshop** in Poland which was organised by Lutz Laschewski and Andrzej Kaleta

supported by his team from Nicolaus Copernicus University. The organisers decided to arrange the meeting as a forum for common language and theory building.

The current state of rural areas in post-socialist societies was widely discussed at the workshop in Poland. Tomasz Sikor presented privatisation processes, the changing market, state and community relations as being responsible for radical changes of social differentiation.

The cases of Vietnam's transition, a village study among Balinese migrant farmers in Indonesia were also discussed.

The next topic was the globalisation process due to the fact that it has changed the spatial order of agriculture. In this context the participants pondered over growing mobility, new consumptive preferences and a changing spatial order of the economy which all determined new demands on the countryside. The speakers made explicit reference to the issue of the heterogeneous character of rural areas in the context of policy decisions over agriculture and rural areas after 1 May 2004.

Andrzej Kaleta from NCU opened a discussion on the Euracademy project. In this context participants discussed the issue of sustained rural development through the usage of ICT as a matter of growing interest among the beneficiaries. Research results have shown the great significance of ICT infrastructure deficiency which made it impossible for over 13 million Polish rural inhabitants to participate in lifelong learning.

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