

Functioning of the Local Production Systems in Central and Eastern European Countries and Siberia

Case Studies and Comparative Studies

Edited by
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*Małgorzata Marks-Krzyszowska**

POLISH AND RUSSIAN RURAL AREAS IN TRANSITION. LAND AND DEMOGRAPHY

1. Introduction

The turn of the 1980s and 1990s brought changes in the political and socio-economic organization of Russia and Poland. They initiated, among other things, free-market economy reforms, transformation towards a democratic system, and reactivation of local governments. The transformation embraced also the rural areas and the agricultural sector associated with them, for which the important role was played by the land legislation. And all reform measures brought the expected results, and the consequences of some failures have been felt to this day. Chaotic agricultural policy and habits related to subordination to the central management of agricultural production have become a barrier to the free-market activities. Moreover, in the initial period of transition, both Poland and Russia almost completely withdrew from subsidizing agriculture. As a result, disorganization and crisis prevailed in the agriculture sector. The reaction to it were corrective actions of the governments and more thought-out policy of rural areas strategic management.

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Rural development is carried out in a different way in various countries and it is conditioned by a set of specific environmental, economic, and social factors. The terms of the macroeconomic environment, including mainly political, but also historical and cultural factors, caused that Poland and Russia have chosen other paths of transformation, yielding diverse results. Above all, the two countries perceive the role of the rural areas in the society in a different way.

The purpose of this article is to present the main changes in the structure of the space and demographic processes of rural areas in Poland and Russia, taking place under the influence of socio-economic transformation after 1990. Though both countries are completely different (e.g. as for the perspective of scale, the position in the international arena, the forms of agricultural production, etc.), they were subjected – within a similar period of time – to the systemic change (from a centrally-controlled system to a market economy) and are faced with multiple problems of the transition period. However, the underlying causes of these problems, their scale and the ways of solving them are quite different. This article is the outcome of the internship completed by the author within the “Functioning of the Local Production Systems in the Conditions of Economic Crisis (Comparative Analysis and Benchmarking for the EU and Beyond),” funded by the 7th Framework Programme of the EU.

2. The main socio-economic reforms in the 1990s in Polish and Russian rural areas

Before 1990, the socio-economic situation in the Russian countryside was different than in Poland. The main difference lied in the organization model of the sector, i.e. the main function of the rural areas. Russian agricultural system was based on the so-called socialized forms of organization, i.e. *kolkhozes* and *sovkhozes* (collective and state farms). In Poland, the socialized sector (cooperatives and state agricultural farms – PGR) accounted for approximately 25% and the system was dominated by individual forms of farming. Russian countryside was forcibly collectivized by the end of the 1920s. This process consisted in forcing peasants to give

of their farms and livestock to the state. The authorities quickly transformed these resources into kolkhozes and sovkhoses, which became almost the only form of farming. Sometimes, the subsidiary household plots of the employees were allowed or even ordered.¹

Presently, socio-economic situation of Polish rural communities and their residents is an effect of political reforms conducted in the 1990s and the accession to the EU in 2004. The legal and political transformation initiated in 1988 sought to lay the foundations of the market economy by abolishing restrictions on private entrepreneurship and creating the possibility of state farms commercialization. It assumed the development of the services sector and the creation of non-agricultural jobs, which are an alternative to agricultural sources of income. Action was taken then to execute the marketization of agriculture itself, including – among other things – market pricing of purchase and retail prices and abolishing subsidies for agricultural production. New conditions became, however, a substantial barrier for the management of the agricultural sector that was not flexible and accustomed to subsidized and command-and-quota-based system. Peasants began to feel a rapid decline in revenue and an increase in production costs and experienced growing difficulties in repayment of their loans. The state farms (PGRs) were not in a position to bear the tax burden. Low agricultural productivity only added momentum to the intensifying crisis. One of the corrective actions was the adoption of the Act of 11 April 2003 on Shaping the Agricultural System. It determined the policy of improving the structure of farms, preventing excessive concentration of agricultural property, and referred to the qualifications of the persons engaged in agricultural activities.

The accession to the European Union has significantly increased the flow of funding of various socio-economic initiatives. It is estimated that from the moment Poland joined the EU to 2010, the agricultural sector alone was supported with 75 billion PLN, of which about 70 billion went to farms to be used primarily for production and modernization. The remainder was allocated for early retirement of peasants, improving

¹ W. Paciorkowski, *Przemiany instytucjonalne wsi w Rosji w latach 1991–1999*, „Wies i Rolnictwo”, 1/2001; Z. Lerman, N. Shagaida, *Land policies and agricultural land markets in Russia*, “Land Use Policy”, 24/2007.

processing and marketing of agricultural products and technical assistance.² Despite many positive changes that have been recorded in the agricultural sector, Polish agriculture compared to other EU countries, is still inefficient, with an excess of labor and unsatisfactory structure of the farms size.

Another significant factor was the reform of local governments of 1990. Under it, local authorities were entrusted with the authority and responsibility for carrying out public tasks on their own territory and were granted legal personality. The Polish administrative reform of 1999 introduced a three-level structure of the country, currently composed of 16 voivode-ships, 314 poviats and 2,479 gminas (including 306 urban, 602 urban-rural and 1,571 rural gminas). In fulfilling their tasks, local governments manage the financial resources derived from taxes and administrative fees, local assets, loans and bonds, general and special purpose grants and other external sources, such as foreign means. For instance, in the years 2007–2013 Polish municipalities received 71.3 billion PLN from EU funds. They were designed primarily for the construction and modernization of road, water and wastewater, and social infrastructure as well as for counteracting digital exclusion.³

As far as the economic transformation in the Russian countryside in the 1990s is concerned, it consisted in the introduction of the land reform⁴ and the reorganization of collective and state farms.⁵ Restructuring started from decollectivization, based on granting them the status of non-state farms having legal personality. To initiate the development of the private sector in the countryside, around 34 millions of employees and retirees of collective farms and state farms received a certificate of ownership of the land – the so-called collective land ownership titles – with the right to participate in the shared ownership. It was assumed that the employees would treat these resources as initial capital and form private farms on this

² J. Wilkin, *Polska wieś 2012 – główne tendencje zjawiska, problemy*, [in:] J. Wilkin, I. Nurzyńska (eds.), *Polska wieś 2010. Raport o stanie wsi*, Scholar, Warsaw 2012.

³ *Samorząd europejski. Ranking wykorzystania funduszy unijnych*, “Rzeczpospolita”, 18.07.2013.

⁴ Land Reform Act of 1990.

⁵ The Resolution of the Russian Federation on the reorganization of kolkhozes and sovkhoses of 1991.

basis. However, the reluctance to manage at one's own risk – conditioned by historical reasons and bad economic situation – blocked most of the initiatives. Great numbers of the citizens passed their titles under the authority of the collective and state farms in exchange for work. In the later period, they often decided to sell their shares. At the same time, there began to develop private-family agricultural enterprises called farms. Enlarging one's acreage was conducted by buying shares and using the offer of a district land distribution fund.⁶

The reforms led to a change in the structure of the agricultural production organization. There were created private agricultural enterprises (peasant's farms) and the so-called household plots. The mixed farming structure was to allow to use the advantages of small- and large-scale agricultural production. However, the state – referring to the “invisible hand” of the market – heavily reduced the budget allocation for agriculture.⁷ The expected economic benefits of the reforms did not occur. The private agricultural production dropped to such an extent that the food security of the country was threatened. Paradoxically, the reforms led to the development of the production of small goods, the ineffectiveness of the capitalization of agriculture, destroying the incentives for employees, the impoverishment of the rural population and degradation of the countryside in the social sphere.⁸ Over the past 10 years, agrarian legislation has been targeted at solving the problems of land ownership relations, improving the standards governing the activities of household plots, stimulating the growth in agricultural consumer cooperation, improving credit conditions for producers of agricultural products, and insuring production risks. Although the changes can be assessed positively, still they have not led to overcoming the crisis in the sector.⁹

⁶ A. Pilichowski, W. Stołbow, *Dekolektywizacja Rolnictwa w Rosji. Perspektywa społeczno-ekonomiczna*, „Przegląd Socjologiczny”, 1–2/2002.

⁷ In 1999, it amounted to 0.17% of GDP, compared to 0.52% in 1995 and 8.8% in 1990 (Z. I. Kalugina, *Vector of Postcrisis Development of Rural Russia*, “Regional Research of Russia”, Vol. (1) 2/ 2011).

⁸ Z. I. Kalugina, *Paradoksy agrarnoj reformy v Rossii: Sotsiologicheskij analiz transformatsionnykh protsessov* [*Paradoxes of Agrarian Reform in Russia: A Sociological Analysis of Transformation Processes*], Izd. IEOPP SO RAN, Novosibirsk 2000, p. 149–150.

⁹ Z. I. Kalugina, *Vector of Postcrisis...*

An element of the system transformation in Russia was the assumption concerning the democratic functioning of the state and the organizations of local governments within its structures.¹⁰ According to the constitution, the Russian Federation is composed of eight federal districts with the authority appointed by the president and 83 equal local government entities functioning in these districts, i.e. 21 republics, 9 countries, 46 districts, 2 cities of federal importance, 1 autonomous region and 4 autonomous areas. A country, district, city of federal importance, autonomous region and autonomous area may create their own statute and legislation. Within these structures, there are functioning human clusters of different status: municipal district, city okrug, urban settlement, rural settlement,¹¹ intra-city territory of a city of federal importance. Their numbers constantly change, which probably is not so much related to the administrative changes, but rather to depopulation problems of Russia.

Table 1. Types of municipal entities in years 2011–2013

Municipal entities	2011	2012	2013
Municipal districts	1824	1821	1817
City okrugs	515	517	518
Intra-city territory of cities of federal importance	236	236	257
Urban settlements	1733	1711	1687

Source: *Russia in Figures. Federal State Statistics Service*, 2013, p. 56.

The development of self-government elements in Russia is complex, inconsistent and complicated, not only because of the intricate structure, but also due to the growth of corruption in public life, the lack of regulation concerning the delegation of local competences, the lack of trust of the citizens in the reformed institutions, etc. Local authorities of rural settlements are in a particular predicament. Before the changes introduced to the system, the organization

¹⁰ The modern organization model is defined in the Act of 2003 “On the general organizational principles of local self-governing in the Russian Federation”.

¹¹ Rural settlement – one or several rural communities (settlements, big villages, Cossack villages, villages, farmsteads, kishlaks, mountain villages and other rural communities), where local self-government is effectuated by the population directly and/or through elected and other local self-government bodies.

of social life in the countryside was dominated and subordinated to kolkhozes and sovkhoses. These entities were not only the employers, but also the planners. The role of the local authorities consisted mainly in providing favorable business conditions for collective entities. The acts of self-governments imposed on the local authorities the responsibility for the planning, construction, infrastructure, social services and community organization, but the authorities received no financial and material basis for these tasks.¹²

3. Major changes in the structure of the Polish and Russian rural areas

Polish territory shows mainly rural traits, although the nature of the area is significantly diverse. There are highly urbanized areas, and traditional, dispersed settlements dominated by agricultural activities. The land is predominantly used for agriculture¹³ (53.2%) or forestry (30.4%), although these uses are often pushed out by the functions of housing, services and industry in the suburban municipalities.

Table 2. The structure of the territory of Russia and Poland

Country	Russia	Poland
Total area (in 2012, sq. km)	16.376.870	304.150
Forest area (% of land area)	49.4	30.4
Agricultural area	13.2	53.2
Water	4.1	2.7
Other	37.5	16.4

Source: www.faostat.fao.org (accessed 17.01.2014).

¹² Cf. W. Paciorek, *Przemiany instytucjonalne wsi w Rosji...*; V. Gel'man, *The politics of local government in Russia: The neglected side of the story*, "Perspectives on European Politics and Society", Vol. 3/2002; P. Kirkov, *Local self-government in Russia: Awakening from slumber?*, "Europe-Asia Studies", Vol. (49)1/1997; D. Fic, *Wpływ zmian politycznych w Rosji na kształtowanie się władzy lokalnej*, „Samorząd Terytorialny”, Vol. 6/2012.

¹³ According to the FAO statistics.

Year after year, the share of land available to agriculture decreases. In the period preceding the Polish integration with the European Union many socio-economic barriers (low profitability of agricultural production and the problems with selling the products) intensified the phenomenon of set-aside and fallow agricultural land. For example, in 2002, 2.3 million hectares of arable land was fallow land, which accounted for 17.6% of the total area, and after the accession to the EU, this acreage was reduced to 1.3 million hectares.

Table 3. Land use in Russia and Poland (in million hectares)

Country	Years	Total	Arable land and orchards		Meadows and pasture	Total	
			total	of which arable land		per capita	% of total area
Poland	2000	17.8	13.9	13.7	3.9	0.47	58.6
	2009	15.6	12.4	12.1	3.2	0.3	50.0
Russia	2000	217.2	126.2	124.4	90.9	1.48	13.3
	2009	215.6	123.5	121.8	92.0	1.51	13.2

Source: *Rocznik Statystyki Międzynarodowej* [Central Statistical Office of Poland], 2012, p. 305.

The implementation of the Common Agricultural Policy and in particular obtaining direct subsidies undoubtedly contributes to the decline in the growth rate of set-aside lands. It is dependent on maintaining the land in good agricultural condition (GAC). The main non-economic reasons for the systematic loss of agricultural land are: resigning from the agricultural use of areas with unfavorable natural conditions, substantial fragmentation of fields and allocating land for non-agricultural purposes (e.g. for construction, infrastructure, afforestation).

Also, the number and structure of the households change. This leads to the development of a new model of agriculture in Poland. There is a clear downward trend in the number of farms. Halamska notes that this process already began in the 1950s, but it gained momentum after 1988.¹⁴ Since

¹⁴ M. Halamska, *Transformacja wsi 1989–2009: Zmienny rytm modernizacji*, „Studia Regionalne i Lokalne”, Vol. (44)2/2011.

2003, the tendency of the smallest farms to disappear has been accompanied by the increasing share of the large-area farms. These are positive developments in terms of improving the competitiveness of the agricultural sector. The declining process affecting small farms, especially those covering up to 0.5 ha, is very appreciated, because of their low productivity and insignificant relation to the market. The share of the large farms has increased due to the aforementioned process of a decrease in the number of the smaller ones. The current average size of a farm has increased and equals around 9.5 ha of arable land.

Table 4. Farms by area groups of agricultural land in Poland (in %)

Years	Total	0–1 ha	1–5 ha	5–10 ha	10–15 ha	15–49 ha	50 and more
1996	3066	33.2	36.8	16.9	7	5.3	0.4
2002	2933	33.3	39.1	14.6	6.2	6.1	0.7
2010	2278	31.4	37.9	15.4	6.7	7.4	1.2

Source: Rocznik Statystyczny Rolnictwo 2010; Powszechny Spis Rolny 2002, Użytkowanie gruntów, powierzchnia zasiewów i pogłowie zwierząt gospodarski, Central Statistical Office of Poland 2003, 2012.

Located on two continents, Russia has the largest land area in the world. It is a country with a very diverse terrain, climate and a large variety of natural resources. Approximately half of the total surface area is covered by forests. As mentioned by Nefedova,¹⁵ the lands for agriculture occupy about one-fourth of the territory, of which only 50% is actually used. The rest are mostly fallow lands, peat bogs and very limited rural settlements and roads. The national average of agricultural land is 13%.

The reduction of the area related to agriculture began earlier than in the 1990s, but the crisis intensified this process. For example, in 1970, Russia had 222 million hectares of arable land, in 1990 – 214 million ha,

¹⁵ T. G. Nefedova, *Agricultural Land in Russia and Its Dynamics*, “Regional Research of Russia”, Vol. (1) 3/2011.

and in 2008 – 195 million ha.¹⁶ The loss of agricultural land over 38 years amounted to about 30 million. The 1990s were characterized by significant losses of the crops cultivation area, much larger than the decrease of the plowed fields.¹⁷ This was a consequence of the crisis of agricultural enterprises, which in 1990 faced the new market conditions and remained deprived of state subsidies. Moreover, according to Nefedova, in Soviet times, entities operating in harsh natural conditions were forced to engage in bigger areas than they actually could manage. Large farms still have much more land than they can handle. There are also signs of “concealed” processes of land abandonment. A lot of land, although still included in the statistics as plowed, is now covered with young forest. It is indicated by the difference between the plowed land and the area under cultivation. In addition, the decline in the percentage of the cultivated land is intensified by the process of buying shares for speculative purposes.¹⁸

Table 5. Types of agricultural farm in Russia (% of the total)

Type of farm	1992	2000	2005	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Agricultural enterprises	67.1	45.2	44.6	48.1	45.4	44.5	47.2	46.7
Household plots	31.8	51.6	49.3	43.4	47.1	48.3	43.8	44.8
Peasant farm	1.1	3.2	6.1	8.5	7.5	7.2	9.0	8.5

Source: Agriculture and Forestry, *Russia in Figures. Federal State Statistics Service*, 2013, p. 275.

The changes in the agricultural land are a consequence of the spontaneously formed new structure of land ownerships. In the period 1990–2000, the share of agricultural enterprises in the use of agricultural land decreased from 98% to 80%, the share of peasants farms increased from virtually

¹⁶ Data given by Nefedova are slightly different than these found in the Concise Statistical Yearbook of Poland.

¹⁷ The crops cultivation area has decreased from 118 to 78 millions of ha during the last 20 years.

¹⁸ T. G. Nefedova, *Agricultural Land in Russia...*; O. Visser, N. Mamonova, M. Spoor, *Oligarchs, megafarms and land reserves: understanding land grabbing in Russia*, “The Journal of Peasant Studies”, Vol. (39)3–4/2012.

zero to 7.4%, and the one of household plots grew from 1.4% to 2.9%.¹⁹ Over the next 10 years, the share of peasants farms and household plots continued to increase. These two sectors now have roughly equal shares in the total agricultural production. Household plots, at the beginning of the transformation, functioned in symbiosis with the kolkhozes and sovkhozes that supported them technically, provided fodder for animals and were knowledge sources. The economic crisis in Russia (unemployment, difficulties in obtaining food, high prices of imported food, poverty) contributed to the growth of interest of the rural and urban population in running farms for their own use and the so-called dachas. A significant increase in the number of household plots is therefore not a consequence of a free choice, but the only way for some people to survive.²⁰

4. Demographic changes in Polish and Russian rural areas

Poland is characterized by a relatively high rate of population density (38.9 million people per 321,000 km²). For example, in rural areas it equals on average 51 persons/km², and in the cities – 1,088 persons/km². In 2010,²¹ the rural areas were inhabited by 15 million people, i.e. about 39% of the total population of the country.²² In comparison to 2002, the number of rural residents increased by over 3%.²³

¹⁹ B. Frumkin, *Problemy i tendencje w Rozwoju rolnictwa Rosji*, [in:] *Dziś i jutro gospodarstw rolnych w krajach Centralnej i Wschodniej Europy* [Problems and trends in the development of agriculture in Russia, [in:] Today and the future of agricultural farms in Central and Eastern Europe], IERiGŻ PIB, Vol. 98/2008.

²⁰ Z. Kalugina, *Agricultural Policy in Russia: Global Challenges and the Viability of Rural Communities*, "International Journal of Sociology of Agriculture and Food", Vol. 22/2014; Z. Kalugina, *Vector of Posteris...*

²¹ This section was prepared, based on: *Obszary wiejskie. Powszechny spis rolny 2010*, GUS 2013; *Obszary wiejskie w Polsce*, GUS, Olsztyn 2011; *Rocznik demograficzny*, GUS, Warszawa 2013.

²² The biggest share of the rural population in the total one (over 50%) can be found in the south-east parts of Poland.

²³ Although during this period 20 rural settlements were granted the municipal status, the number of the population in the cities decreased then by 0.6%.

The demographic situation in rural areas is depicted by the data on the real growth, which takes into account the birth rate and migration. In 2009, in the countryside, it amounted to 0.4% of the population. Currently, in the countryside, more children are born (per 1000 persons) than in the cities. The total fertility rate in 2009 was 1.50.²⁴

The number of residents is also affected by internal migration between the rural and urban areas and foreign labor migration. The balance of these two processes results in an increase of the population in rural areas in Poland. Since 2000, there has been a noticeable positive balance of internal migration. Despite the inconveniences and civilization delays (e.g. time and cost of traveling to the city, the lack of social infrastructure or insufficient services, the lack of jobs in the community, etc.), the countryside is a place of residence that is chosen increasingly more often. Even 50% of the rural youth and 13% of the urban youth declare their willingness to live in rural areas.²⁵ International migration, particularly to the UK, Ireland and Denmark, reduces the number of the rural population. It concerns, however, much smaller numbers of people than internal migration.

Polish rural population, compared to other European countries, is relatively young. In 2010, the age ratio (the proportion of people aged 65 and more) was among the lowest in the European Union. The average life expectancy in rural areas in 2009 amounted to 71 years for men and 80 years for women. The life expectancy for men in rural areas was lower than that for the male residents of the urban areas (72 years). For rural women it was 80 years. Since 2003, the average life expectancy in rural areas for both sexes increased by one year.

In 2010, the share of persons with higher education in the rural population accounted for circa 9%. Women had higher education more often than men (10% vs. 7%). Rural areas were characterized by a high proportion of people with basic vocational education (29%) and primary education (26%). Although in the last decade the level of education has relatively quickly increased, the percentage of the population with higher education is still three times lower than in the cities.

²⁴ 1.33 in cities.

²⁵ K. Szafranec, *Szanse życiowe wiejskiej młodzieży*, [in:] J. Wilkin, I. Nurzyńska (eds.), *Polska wieś 2010. Raport o stanie wsi*, Scholar, Warsaw 2012.

In summary, the current demographic situation in Polish rural areas is satisfactory and in some respects more favorable than in urban areas. However, long-term projections indicate potential problems. The regions most vulnerable to aging are the eastern provinces of Poland, and the areas more prone to depopulation include the świętokrzyskie, opolskie and łódzkie voivodeships. Depopulation, caused mainly by migration to the cities, is expected in rural regions of eastern Poland. The population growth in rural areas is expected to occur primarily in the suburban areas of major Polish cities.

At the same time, Russia is a country with a very large population (143 million), but due to the huge area it has a relatively low population density (8.1 persons/km²). A characteristic feature of modern Russia is population decline, depopulation of some areas and the progressive, uneven population centered mainly around large urban agglomerations, especially Moscow.

Unfavorable demographic situation has been one of the most serious problems in Russia since the beginning of the economic crisis. D. Szymańska even calls this country “the leader of demographic degradation”.²⁶ Since the early 1990s, there has been observed a drastic decrease in the number of the population, a growth in the negative birth rate, and a decline in the fertility rate. According to the World Bank, the number of Russians has decreased in the last two decades by 5.7 million.

The negative demographic processes are noted across the country, although with different intensity. The territory east of the Urals with particularly harsh living conditions and rural areas are becoming increasingly depopulated. The residents of the countryside, especially the younger ones, consistently move to the big cities, especially those located in the European part of the country. The negative demographic trends are influenced, beyond the economic crisis, also by the negative institutional changes of the family and the lack of incentives to live in sparsely populated areas. These processes contribute to, *inter alia*, a reduction in the number of villages. Currently, there are 18.722 rural settlements, while 10 years ago there were more than 24 thousand.

²⁶ D. Szymańska, *Kryzys demograficzny w Rosji*, [in:] S. Ciok, P. Migoń (eds.), *Przekształcenia struktur przestrzennych – aspekty społeczne, ekonomiczne i przyrodnicze*, Instytut Geografii i Rozwoju Regionalnego, Wrocław 2010, p. 4.

Table 6. Number of rural settlements in Russia the period 2003–2013

Years	2003	2005	2007	2009	2011	2012	2013
Rural settlements	24421*	24373*	22944	20127	18996	18833	18722

* Including rural soviets (selsoviets), volosts, rural areas (okrugs), local self-government bod.

Source: *Russia in Figures. Federal State Statistics Service*, 2011, 2012, 2013.

Currently, 26% of the population live in rural areas. Unfortunately, according to the last Census of Russia, the average annual decline rate in the rural population in eight years (2002–2010) amounted to 0.39%, which is three times higher than in case of urban areas.²⁷ In comparison with the previous period (1989–2002), the rate has tripled.

Table 7. Total number of population, the proportion of urban and rural population in Russia

Population	Average annual rate of decline in %	
	1989–2002	2002–2010
Total	–0.09	–0.20
Urban	–0.10	–0.13
Rural	–0.06	–0.39

Source: www.gks.ru (accessed 17.01.2014).

Since 1992, a negative birth rate has been observed in Russia, although in recent years its negative values have decreased. The birth rate in rural areas is lower than in the cities. For comparison, in 1960 it was 18.3 for rural settlements and 13.7 for cities (per 1000 persons); in 1990 it equaled 2.3 for rural areas and 2.2 for cities, and in 2005 it fell to –7.6 in the countryside and –5.3 in the cities. Furthermore, there is a sustaining

²⁷ For comparison, according to the FAO statistics: in Poland, in 2000–2010, there was noted an average yearly increase in the number of rural areas inhabitants by 0.1%. In a comparable period in Russia, this indicator equaled –0.1% (FAOSTAT. Russian Federation, www.faostat.fao.org, accessed 17.01.2014).

high infant mortality rate, although it should be noted that it is twice lower than in the early 1990s. For instance, in 2011, it was 9.1 for rural areas and 6.6 for the cities.

Table 8. Polish and Russian population in cities and villages

Country	2000		2005		2010	
	city	village	city	village	city	village
Poland	61.9	38.1	61.5	38.5	61.0	39.0
Russia	73.4	26.7	72.9	27.1	73.2	26.8

Source: Rocznik Statystyki Międzynarodowej 2012, *Russia in Figures*. Federal State Statistics Service, 2010. Population.

Another analyzed demographic feature is life expectancy, which in 2011 equaled about 70 years. Women live longer than men, which is also typical for other countries. What raises concerns, however, is the early age of mortality of men: in 1995 it was 58 years (72 for women), and in 2011 it equaled 64 years (76 years for women). The causes of premature death are mainly suicides, accidents in the workplace and diseases of the cardiovascular system caused by alcoholism. Moreover, there are very clear differences between the life expectancy of the residents of villages and cities. The most disadvantaged are men who live in the countryside. In 1994, the average age for this group was approximately 56 years and in 2011 it was 62 years. The reasons for this situation, besides the aforementioned causes, are much more difficult living conditions in the countryside. They arise not only from the harsh conditions of the natural environment, but also the social factors, such as the lack of access to health care institutions. The low quality of life is confirmed by the data indicating the alarmingly low state of basic sanitation facilities. Only every fourth of rural farms has access to hot water (although this rate has increased by 15% in 15 years). In addition to this, less than half of the flats in Russia have access to water supply and a sanitary-sewage system.²⁸

A major problem in rural areas is poverty. According to the World Bank, in 2002, the poverty rate for rural areas was 30%, and in 2006 it amounted to 20%.

²⁸ M. Gorczyca, *Mieszkalnictwo w Rosji*, „Wiadomości Statystyczne”, Vol. 9/2013.

Table 9. Poverty headcount ratio at rural poverty line (% of rural population) in Russia

Years	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Rural poverty rate	30.0	29.0	25.2	22.7	21.2
Poverty gap at rural poverty line (%)	8.7	8.4	7.1	6.1	5.5

Source: www.data.worldbank.org (accessed 14.01.2014).

In conclusion, Russia's rural population has been seriously affected by the economic and social crisis. The countryside is not an attractive place to live or work for young Russians, which leads to aging and depopulation. Consequently, this has a negative impact on food production and distribution due to the increased distances between the production and consumption points and the lowering number of potential agricultural workers.²⁹

5. Conclusions

The changes in the agriculture, economy and society are closely related. The complexity of these relationships depends on the general economic development of the state and on its policy. In developed countries, agriculture is still an important sector of the economy – it provides crops, generates jobs and makes the source of income. However, there is observed a gradual reduction of its impact on the economy and society. This is reflected in the increasingly smaller share of agriculture in GDP and the gradual reduction of space dedicated to this activity. Moreover, the increase in agricultural productivity reduces the demand for labor.

Comparative analyzes of the processes taking place in the Polish and Russian countryside make a very difficult task. This is due to technical reasons, such as incomparability of some statistical data and the organizational and political uniqueness of both countries. The main difference lies in the role of rural areas in the contemporary politics of Poland and Russia.

²⁹ FAOSTAT. Russian Federation, www.faostat.fao.org (accessed 17.01.2014).

Polish countryside develops by implementing the principles of the Common Agricultural Policy and using the financial support of the European Union. The main aim of these activities is multifunctional development, understood as a process of progressive change in non-agricultural spheres of activity (tourism, trade, services) in the rural areas. The countryside is no longer an area limited solely to agricultural production, but a place of diversified business and even a residential area.

Russian countryside is identified traditionally as a place dominated and dependent on agriculture. However, despite the recent food insecurity hazards, this sector has been depreciated in relation to other parts (sectors) of the economy. Unfortunately, the reform measures have not protected the rural areas from spatial and social degradation. The extremely unfavorable demographic situation in the Russian countryside clearly demonstrates that the current policy has lacked the appropriate social approach. The negligence in the technical, social, and housing infrastructure together with the shortage of employment opportunities cause depopulation in rural areas, which in the future may hinder their development. In conclusion, the Russian countryside needs immediate help in eliminating the adverse socio-economic processes and support for the multifunctional and sustainable development. At the core of this policy lies understanding that the modern countryside may perform non-agricultural functions. Rural areas can become an attractive place to live and work if the gap between the living conditions in the village and in the city is significantly reduced.

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Abstract

The aim of this article is to present the main changes in the structure of the space and demographic processes of rural areas in Poland and Russia, taking place after 1990. Though both countries are completely different (e.g. as for the perspective of scale, the position in the international arena, the forms of agricultural production, etc.), they were subjected – within a similar period of time – to the systemic change and are faced with multiple problems of the socio-economic transition period. The terms of the environment, including mainly political, but also historical and cultural factors, caused that Poland and Russia have chosen other paths of transformation, yielding diverse results. Above all, the two countries perceive the role of the rural areas in the society in a different way.

Key words: rural areas, Poland, Russia, socio-economic transformations.