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SOCIOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF DEMOGRAPHIC PROBLEMS
OF PRESENT-DAY POLISH VILLAGE

Demographic problems of the present-day Polish village boil down to aging and depopulation as the most important processes taking place there.

The problems studied by demographers, sociologists and agricultural economists as well have received a great deal of attention in scientific reports and diagnoses; they are constantly discussed in rural publications and press.

Migration from rural areas is characterized with growing dynamics. Empirical studies indicate that the highest increase in these migratory streams was observed in the seventies, and they were strongest towards the end of that decade i.e. since 1976. Migration from villages assumes different directions with predominance of rural-urban migration (it is worth noting here that oftentime this is migration to towns of medium size, and thus simply to centres with urban status). Another important migratory trend is migration from one village to another - it is predominated by women and caused mainly by marriage and necessity of moving to a village and to husband's farm, as these are men who mainly inherit property or take over ownership of a farm. Similar quantitative trends can be observed in the case of abandoning farming and agriculture. The scale of decrease in the number of people professionally active in agriculture can be

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seen from the following data: over the decade 1950-1970 between 2.7-3.0 million people went away to non-agricultural professions, the projected drop in the number of professionally active population in agriculture for the years 1971-1980 amounted to ca. 0.6 million people, while in the present decade of 1981-1990 a further decrease of about 0.8 million people should be reckoned with¹.

Obviously the problem does not lie in the scale of the phenomenon alone. Migration from agriculture should be balanced by inflow of industrial means of production to agriculture. Some researchers see migrations of rural population as a developmental necessity being a result of development dynamics of the entire economy, which determines demand for labour. According to them, it is impossible to ensure a desirable growth of labour productivity in agriculture, and thus also increase of incomes of people employed there without an outflow of a part of labour force from agriculture (depending, of course, on the area size of farms). Accordingly, the main problem is here not so much the outflow of population from agriculture as such but a negative selection to agriculture (caused mainly by income disproportions at present), and the fact that any drop in labour force must be replaced by a bigger stream of technical means. Some experts believe that these problems may be reconciled, among others, through promotion of labour division in agriculture, and thus - through specialization.

Thus, factors contributing to accelerated growth of migration from agriculture include:

- changes in overall demand for agricultural labour i.e. savings on direct labour,
- development of land concentration processes in the private sector².

An important factor accelerating or slowing-down migration

¹ I. F r e n k e l, Factors Dynamizing and Restricting Rate of Decline in Agricultural Employment till 1990, [in:] A. W o ś (ed.), Socio-economic Problems in Development of Village and Agriculture in Poland (in Polish), Warsaw 1978.

² A. W o ś, Relationships between Overall Economic Growth and Rate of Agricultural Growth, [in:] W o ś (ed.), op. cit. (in Polish).

from villages and agriculture is professional mobility of rural population. In turn, it depends on very many factors, among others, on personal characteristics, broadly-understood quality of local environment, and the state's socio-economic policy towards the village. Below, we shall try to provide a general answer to the question who migrates from villages. Due to the significance of the problem, our attention will be focussed on professionally active population, and not on inhabitants of villages as such.

Trends of changes among professionally active population in agriculture were, among others, affected by the area structure of farms. There was observed a differing dynamics of changes according to the area of a farm: prevailing drop in employment density in all land-area groups and a trend towards reduction of the drop rate along with increase in the area of farms (density of employment is equal to the number of professionally active people per one farm or one unit of arable land).

In most area groups of farms below 15 ha. migration encompassed mainly men; along with increase in the area of farms the outflow of men gradually declined.

Both in the case of men and women a trend towards stronger migration from smaller farms was more pronounced and more common over the years 1960-1970 than in the period 1950-1960, and its further intensification could be observed in the seventies.

There could be noted a phenomenon of young people remaining in bigger farms and a phenomenon of expanding area of farms run by younger people.

A conclusion which may be drawn here is that a big, profitable and specialized farm represents a factor which may induce people to remain in the village, and thus it may check negative selection and migration decisions.

Changes in the sex structure may be generally described as a constant drop in the share of men among those professionally active in agriculture (at least it was the case in the 1950-1970 period). Simultaneously, professionally active population in bigger farms (10-15 ha. and more) is characterized with a balance of sexes, and even a slight predominance of men. Thus, the concentration factor in agriculture promotes defeminization

of the peasant's profession although its impact is much weaker within the sector of peasant farming than within the state sector.

Another characteristic feature of the seventies was a predominance of women among emigrants from rural areas. And although the prevailing direction of this emigration was from village to village, women represented almost the same share as men among persons emigrating to towns.

1970 witnessed an increase in feminization rate among people running their private farms. It differed from one administrative district to another, and e.g. in Katowice province, where industry continues to attract male labour away from agriculture and village, the share of women among the farming population amounted to 50 per cent. A similar situation could be observed in administrative provinces of Cracow, Rzeszów, and Zielona Góra. It resulted not only in feminization of the farmer's profession but in feminization of some rural aggregations as well. Such a situation affects the family life, upbringing and care of children as well as the way the farmer's role is performed whenever it is assumed by a woman and simultaneously a mother. It is well known that the farmer's role is often connected with longer absence from home, ability to establish contacts with other people, institutions and organizations, state offices, and make major economic decisions etc., and a rural woman is neither culturally nor formally prepared for it.

What is more, the present-day demographic processes occurring in the Polish village destroy the traditional, multi-generation peasant's family (small rural families as well) with this family performing functions of a basic economic and simultaneously social unit in the village.

Changes in the age structure can be briefly described as the process of aging of professionally active population. This trend towards aging of professionally active rural population appeared already in the fifties and has been growing ever since. In 1970, almost one fourth of all people employed in the private agricultural sector reached the post-productive age. This process encompassed all area groups of farms being most pronounced in small and medium-sized farms and a little weaker in under-sized and bigger farms (10 to 15 ha.).

The situation when both professionally active farmers and all the remaining members of their families are over 50 years of age becomes increasingly common (they represented 15 per cent in 1977). To a growing extent, farms run by elderly people are one-person farms, and for their most part they are run by lonely women.

The rural population aging process is one of the most significant consequences of migration of young people (between 18 and 39 years of age) from villages. Among emigrants there are young men and young women, although the causes of their migration decisions may be somewhat different. In the light of some empirical studies the main cause of leaving villages by women is marriage with professional work ranking second. In the case of men, the main migration motive is work, followed by education, and marriage ranking third.

Despite these differences one thing is common, and that is a search for life stabilization outside one's own local environment³. A prevailing general trend in the contemporary Polish society consisting in a desire to improve one's own social position in relation to that of one's own parents finds its reflection in the village. A conviction about social promotion accompanying migration to the town accounts for the fact that parents seldom see the future of their child in the village, unless they are elderly people running a big and profitable farm and wishing to have successors. Unfortunately, the stereotype of the town as a place affording better life quality, better opportunities and chances of choosing an attractive way of life and easier work continues to predominate. In the studies quoted above, for example, almost 90 per cent of respondents expressed an opinion that their relatives living in the town were better off than if they had lived in the village. After all, motivation to migrate is affected by quality and frequency of contacts with the town, which are determined by having relatives or close friends in the town. We might say here that in as much

³ E. S t a s i a k, Environmental Determinants of Migration Decisions in Village of Suwałki Administrative District (in Polish), typescript, library of the Institute of Sociology, University of Łódź.

as in the postwar years every urban family could find its relatives in the country, in the eighties the situation is just reversed.

A negative appraisal of one's own local environment pushing people to emigrate from the village to the town has not only its social aspect such as, e.g. desire to get rid of penetrating social control, obtain a higher social position etc. It is often a result of realistic assessment of possibilities of satisfying "on the spot" basic needs of individuals and social groups. Differences between living conditions in agriculture and outside it, degree of development of the educational system and model of education offering preferences for urban children and urban schools, disproportions in development of housing and transport infrastructure etc., all this consolidates or generates emigration drives. This is quite often accompanied by another important factor of psychosocial nature, and namely by conviction about a low position held by the farmer's profession, negative appraisal of this profession by potential future farmers. This conviction, even if it were unfounded, does exist and is supported by different institutions, offices etc. in which the peasant-farmer as an applicant is oftentime treated impolitely and disdainfully.

Unfortunately, these days the town is unable to meet all the expectations of the stable wave of immigrants from the village. It is not so much the question of the labour market as it can absorb the new labour, but rather of full adaptation to a new environment - the urban environment. This problem is seldom taken into account when taking migration decisions. Similarly, emigration to the town does not necessarily have to be connected with social promotion (e.g. a vast majority of immigrants undertake manual work). The main barrier in the process of adaptation to new conditions is the educational background although emigrants from villages include also young people who migrate to towns in search of further education. It is worth noting here that they usually do not return to the village.

The educational structure of population professionally active in agriculture points at huge shortcomings in this sphere. For example, in 1974 ca. 50 per cent of those managing their

agricultural farms did not have full primary education, 45.5 per cent had primary education, and only 4.5 per cent higher than primary education. And although the formal educational background in this professional group cannot be identified with the level of professional training, especially in private peasant farming, the possibility of compensating the educational background with practical skills is growing smaller and smaller.

Additionally, another unfavourable fact is that there remain in agriculture, first of all, young people without primary education while among those immigrating to town prevail young people with a higher than primary education.

The above presented demographic image of the contemporary Polish village along with its basic determinants induces reflection on social consequences of such situation.

It is hard here to speak about more or less essential consequences. These include, first of all, agricultural farms run by elderly people, in which, out of necessity, people have to work until their physical strength is exhausted. It is also a dramatic situation of lonely old people, for their most part women, in farms without successors; old age of people without their own farmland or of owners of undersized farms; situation of elderly people running their homes jointly with their children characterized with constant conflicts having their background in property and ownership issues, differences of characters, level of culture etc. Provision of care for these people is a duty of various rural organizations although it is hard to expect here solutions that would be desirable for elderly people such as, for example, homes for the aged similar to those in towns. A positive solution seems to be, on the other hand, encompassing farmers by the pension system.

The above discussion affords one conclusion of a general nature. Namely, a tremendous difference between the village and the town pulls the most valuable individuals out of their local environment while simultaneously they or people similar to them might improve this poor quality of rural life in their homeplace, in their village.

It may be expected that the last few years characterized with deterioration of "urban-like" life will check a little

this huge outflow of population from villages, but that is prompted not by social but rather by economic factors and as such it may fulfil only a short-term temporary function of a factor curbing migration from the village to the town.

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SOCJOLOGICZNE ASPEKTY DEMOGRAFICZNYCH PROBLEMÓW WSPÓŁCZESNEJ WSI POLSKIEJ

Demograficzny kształt współczesnej wsi polskiej ma już wagę i znaczenie problemu społecznego; współcześnie mamy bowiem do czynienia z wynaturzeniami demograficznych struktur na wsi polskiej (dotyczy to struktur wg podstawowych cech demograficznych, takich jak: wiek, płeć, wykształcenie, skład zawodowy, liczebność zbiorowości i gęstość zaludnienia).

Każde z nich niesie określone implikacje socjologiczne. I tak np. patrząc na strukturę wg wieku, dostrzec trzeba proces starzenia się ludności wiejskiej, wpływ wieku na decyzje dotyczące wyboru zawodu, wyboru miejsca pracy, miejsca zamieszkania itp.; spojrzenie na strukturę ludności wiejskiej wg płci wymaga zastanowienia nad feminizacją zbiorowości, feminizacją zawodu rolnika, brakiem możliwości znalezienia partnera do życia małżeńsko-rodzinnego itp.; struktura wg wykształcenia nasuwa wnioski o spełnianiu przez tę cechę roli bariery przydatności zawodowej, bariery możliwości adaptacyjnych w nowym środowisku społecznym itp.; struktura wg składu zawodowego ludności wiejskiej każe pamiętać o stałym ubytku ludności czynnej zawodowo w rolnictwie, a także o potrzebie różnicowania się zawodowego mieszkańców wsi choćby ze względu na kadrowe potrzeby wielorakich i różnorodnych instytucji wiejskich; liczebność zbiorowości i gęstość zaludnienia to cechy, które stają się np. ważnymi wyznacznikami "opłacalności" niektórych przedsięwzięć z zakresu polityki społecznej, a przede wszystkim barierą wciąż oczekiwanego postępu w rolnictwie.

Wyludnianie się wsi polskiej, jej starzenie się, feminizacja zawodu rolnika - to nadal podstawowe problemy demograficzne z natury, ale o społecznych konsekwencjach.

Socjolog dostrzegać musi społeczne uwarunkowania owych struktur demograficznych. Uwarunkowania te mają zarówno charakter zewnętrzny w stosunku do wsi (są wyrazem niedostatków polityki państwa wobec wsi, zwłaszcza polityki społecznej i kulturalnej), jak również charakter środowiskowy (niedostatki jakości życia wiejskiego w sferze kultury, urbanistyczno-mieszkańcowej, warunków pracy w rolnictwie, opieki zdrowotnej, oświaty, lokalnego rynku pracy itp.).

Jednocześnie trzeba zdawać sobie sprawę ze społecznych konsekwencji określonego demograficznego obrazu wsi polskiej, do których przede wszystkim należą: nierzadko dramatyczna sytuacja

ludzi starych, istnienie gospodarstw bez następców, istnienie rozdziewku między oczekiwaniami i potrzebami ludności wiejskiej a zasobami ludzkimi na wsi.

Konkludując stwierdzamy, że współczesny demograficzny kształt wsi polskiej, mając swe społeczne uwarunkowania, stanowi jednocześnie barierę zmian i poprawy jakości życia wiejskiego.