

CONTEMPORARY TRANSFORMATIONS OF THE RURAL SPACE IN POLAND: SELECTED PROBLEMS

JERZY BAŃSKI

Poland has been for already more than a decade functioning in conditions of the new socio-economic system. Thus, one can dare the first observations concerning the processes, which have taken place during this period in rural areas. It appears, though, that the most important transformations occurred within urban space, while the countryside remained for a long time dormant.

Yet, the last decade of the past century brought new elements into the socio-economic life of the countryside. First of all – the new economic functions appeared, primarily tourism, service, and housing, life quality having improved within the rural areas. On the attractive areas, tourism and recreation became the economic activation factors, while the revenues of the local population accruing from the tourist services exceed their revenues from farming.

On the other hand, the residential and service functions develop dynamically in the suburban zones. Numerous petty businesses, production and service oriented, appeared along the primary transport routes. One can in this case speak of urbanisation of the countryside, since these areas are with respect to the functions fulfilled and the job locations of their inhabitants more like towns than like villages. The primary transport routes have thereby become the urbanisation corridors.

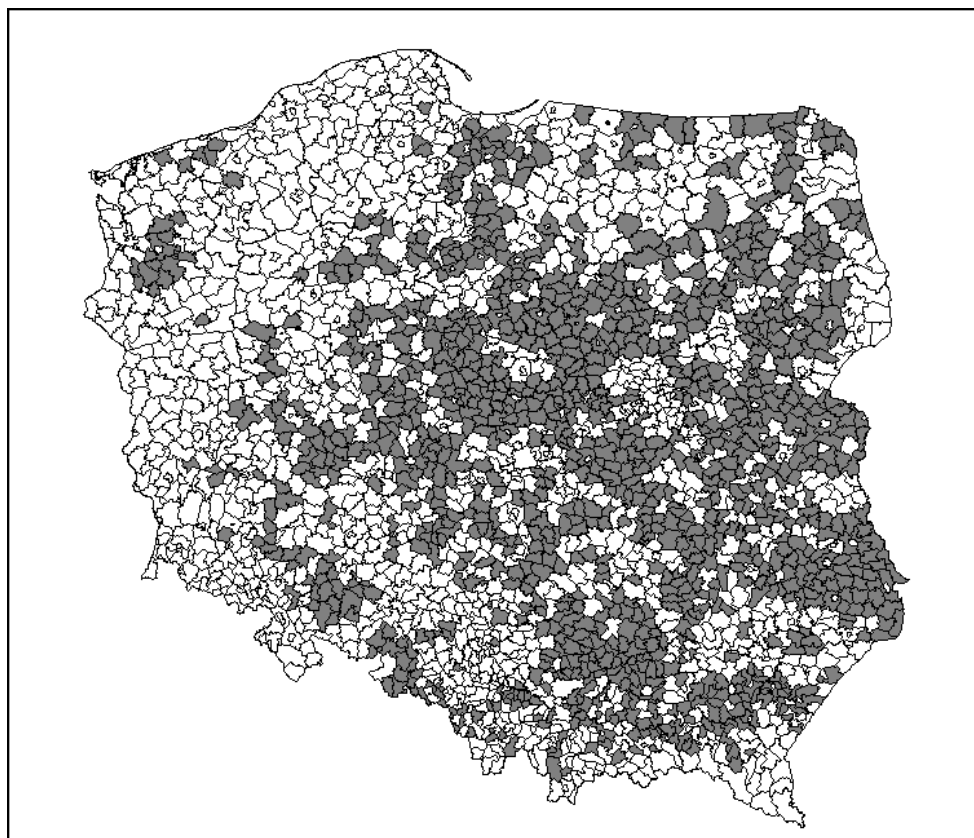
The suburban areas are also becoming the bedrooms of towns. An increasing number of persons having lived until quite recently in towns move to the countryside. They are usually well educated and wealthy, with high demands as to the quality of life. Thereby, the state of social and technical infrastructure is improved and the processes of economic activation of these areas advance.

The majority of the rural areas are, however, still dominated by the agricultural function.¹ The map of the functional structure of the countryside, elaborated on the basis of a set of diagnostic features, indicates that the agricultural functions dominate on the areas of central and eastern Poland (*Figure 1*). The level of development of agriculture there is very low, and thus it is necessary to search for other economic functions that could activate these areas.

¹ Bański, J.–Stola, W. 2002: Transformation of the spatial and functional structure of rural areas in Poland, Rural Studies, IGSO, Warsaw, 3.

Figure 1

Monofunctional agricultural areas, 1999



Source: edited by the author.

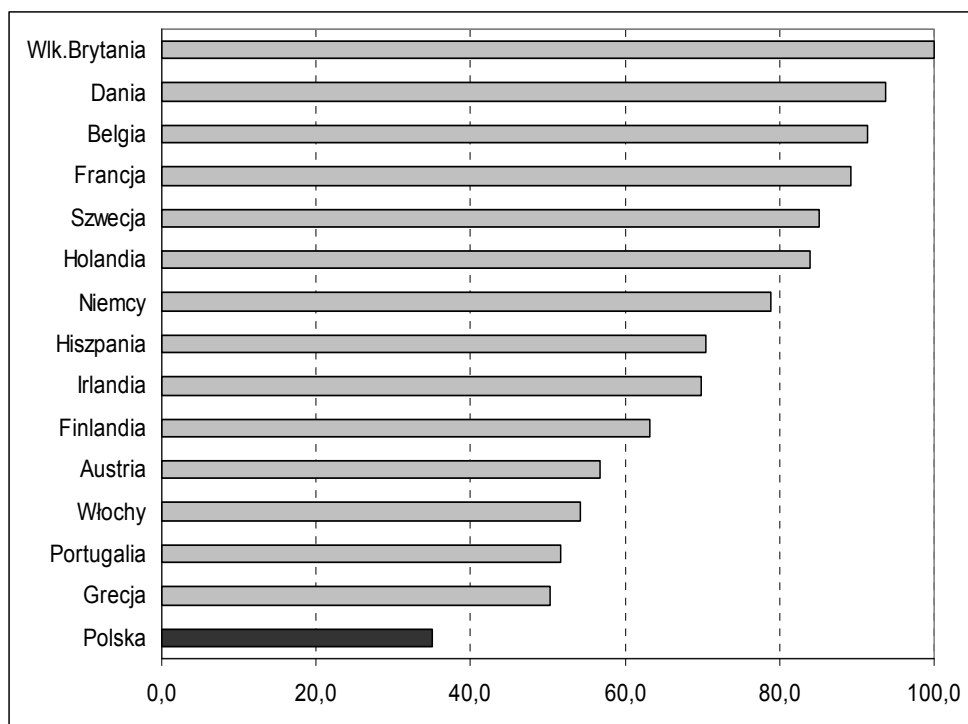
Polish agriculture displays an important lag with respect to the agriculture of the countries of the European Union. The indicator of agricultural development calculated on the basis of six features (employment level in agriculture, average yields of wheat and sugar beets, equipment with tractors and wheat harvesters, milk yields, value of agricultural exports per person in agriculture, acreage of farms) shows that even with respect to the EU outsiders we are far behind.

The results obtained can be compared to a 100 metre run. We can imagine that the runners represent the countries of the EU and Poland. At the sound of the starter's signal they begin to run. At the instant the British farmer crosses the finish line, the Danish one has run 90 metres, the German – 80 metres, the Greek – 50 metres, while the Polish farmer – only 35 metres, and so has twice as much yet to

cover. When considering this image, though, we should remember that the farmers from the EU are running on the dope (subsidies, compensations...).

Figure 2

The indicator of the level of development of Polish agriculture in comparison with the EU countries, 1999



Source: edited by the author.

The recent years have aggravated the differences, because agriculture in Poland went through a serious crisis. Still, not all of the features of our agriculture ought to be evaluated in a negative way. The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), as having taken shape in the last decade, aiming at “ecologisation” and lowering of intensity of the agricultural activities, determines the direction that is advantageous for Polish farming. Polish farming, namely, produces over significant surfaces with the use of extensive and ecological processes. This is confirmed by the use of mineral fertilisers, which is lower in Poland 2–3 times and of the pesticides, which is lower

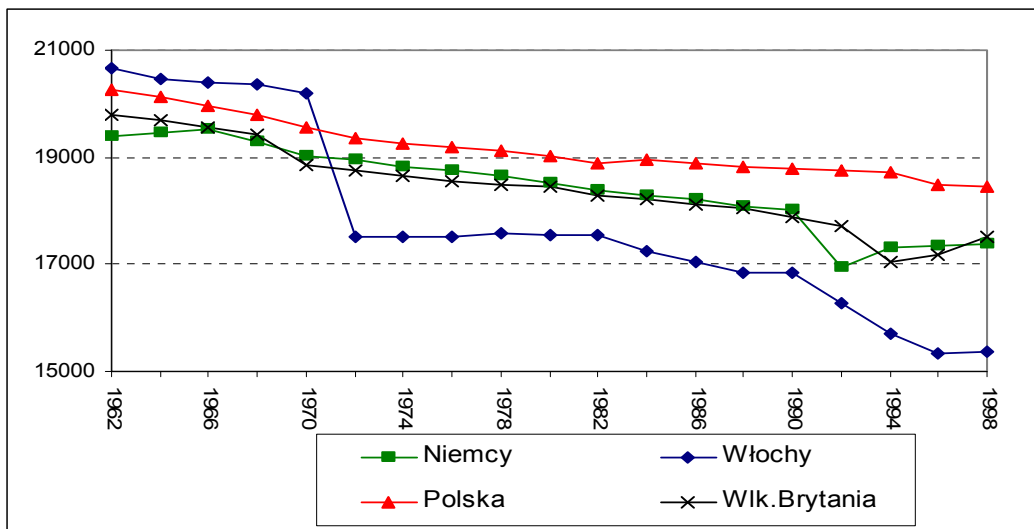
seven times than in the countries of the European Union. It can be concluded that Poland has the smallest distance with respect to the new model of agriculture being established within the framework of the CAP.

The period of the last several decades has been characterised by a slight, but constant, decrease of the agricultural land area (*Figure 3*). A similar process has been taking place in other countries of Europe. The areas of all the other land use categories – and especially of forests – have been increasing at the expense of agricultural land (*Figure 4*). One should add at this point that – in addition – a significant part of land classified as agricultural is in reality not used. This part consists of fallow and wastelands, whose area amounted in 1996 to almost 2 million hectares. Their shares were the highest in western and northwestern Poland.

The structure of agricultural land use has not changed in a significant manner during the 1990s. Within the framework of land use the area of arable land and productive meadows has been decreasing, while that of orchards and pastures – increasing. Similar processes had been also observed in the preceding years.²

Figure 3

Change in the area of agricultural land in the years 1962–1996
(in '000 hectares)

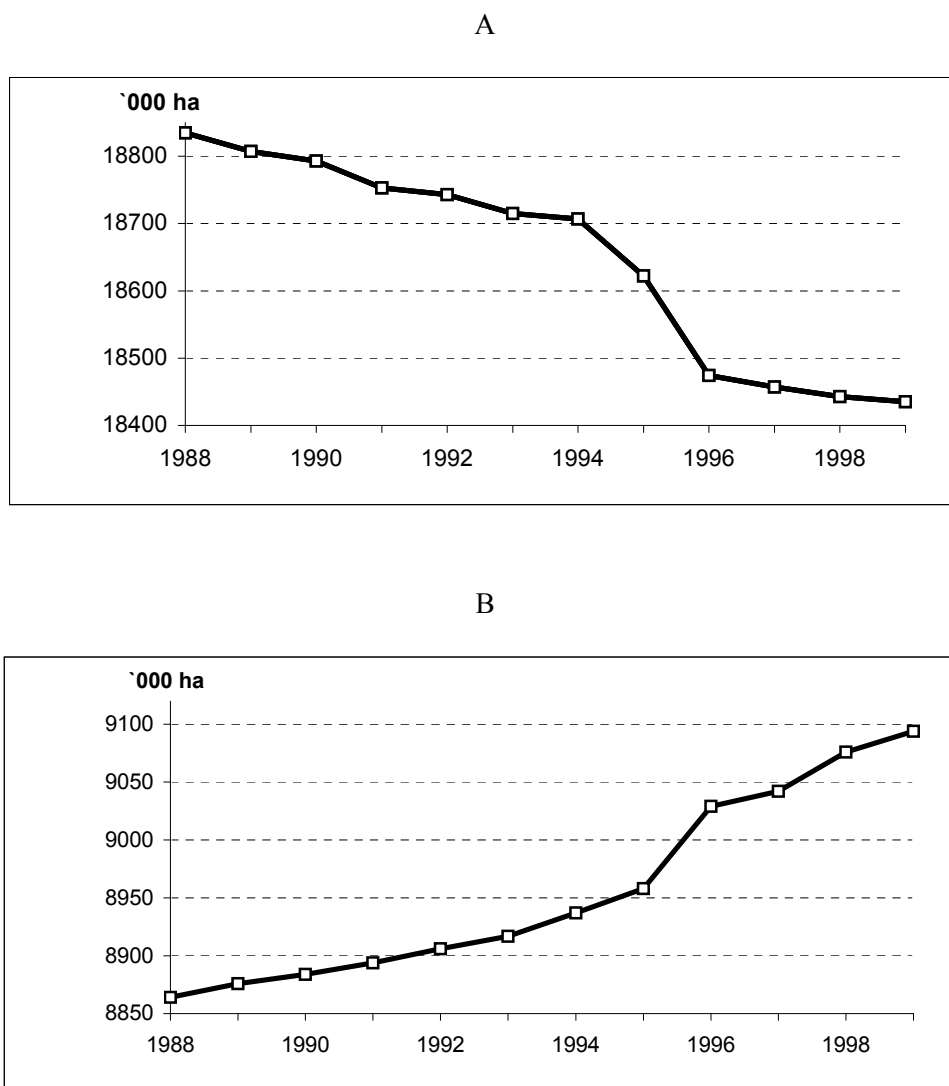


Source: edited by the author.

² Bański, J. 1992: *The structure of agricultural land in Poland and tendencies of changes in its components over the period 1975–1988*, Comparisons of landscape pattern dynamics in European rural areas, EUROMAB Research Program, 1991 Seminars, pp. 260–267.

Figure4

Area of agricultural land (A) and forests (B), 1988–1999



Source: edited by the author.

The 1990s brought enormous changes in the land ownership structure. The so-called “socialised” sector of agriculture (the state and co-operative farms) collapsed, and a significant part of its land was taken over by private farming. Yet in 1989 the “socialised” sector functioned on close to 24% of agricultural land, while in 1996 – on only 7% (although still formally owning roughly 20% of agricultural land). The Agency of Agricultural Property of the State Treasury, established in 1992, took over the land of the state farms. Note that although agricultural land is mostly in private hands, forests remain almost exclusively state-owned. In 1993 the public sector owned 83% of the entire forest area.

There is an increasing interest in land purchase from the side of foreigners. Thus, in the years 1990–1998 the licences were granted for land purchase of the following total areas: in the period 1990–1995 – altogether 7,115 hectares, in 1996 – 2,439 hectares, in 1997 – 2,942 hectares, in 1998 – 4,355 hectares. The highest intensity of turnover with this respect is observed in northern Poland, where the land formerly owned by the state farms is relatively cheap. The purchase of agricultural land being state property, is very difficult for a foreigner. There are, certainly, informal manners of purchasing land by the foreigners. The most frequently used is the method of “fictitious marriage” with a Polish citizen, or the purchase by a substitute, who is a Polish citizen.

Land prices are highly spatially differentiated. The highest prices are quoted in large urban agglomerations, but the turnover is marginal. With respect to the smaller localities the most expensive land is in the vicinity of Warsaw, where prices for 1 square metre reach 100 Euro. One can build there a hotel, a restaurant, a warehouse – but these plots are not meant for industrial development. In the Warsaw suburban zone the land, on which industrial premises can be built, costs between 15 and 50 Euro per 1 sq. m. In comparison, land prices in the vicinity of Poznań range between 3 and 20 Euro per 1 sq. m.

During the last decade there has been an increasing interest in construction of second homes on recreation plots. Land is being purchased primarily by the residents of large agglomerations (Warsaw, Cracow, Lodz, etc.). The attractive tourist regions (Carpathian Mts., Sudety Mts., Masurian Lakeland, etc.) enjoy the highest degree of interest, along with the forested suburban areas. Land (usually of low agricultural quality) is classified as non-agricultural and sold to purchasers for very high prices. Over the last ten years the price of such land in the most attractive locations increased several to a dozen times.

Table 1
Agricultural land and farm areas according to the Agricultural Census of 1996

Items	Agricultural land (‘000 hectares)	Shares of total agricultural land (%)	Average farm acreage
Private sector	16,099.2	92.8	6.5
Domestic private ownership including:	15,981.3	92.1	5.2
Private farms	14,639.1	84.4	4.8
Production co-operatives	501.5	2.9	203.3
Other farms	18.3	0.1	29.0
Foreign property	72.9	0.4	729.1
Mixed property	45.0	0.3	1,249.5
Public sector	1,249.1	7.2	619.6
State property	1,242.2	7.2	636.0
Communal property	1.5	–	29.2
Mixed property	5.4	–	538.5

Source: Rocznik Statystyczny Rolnictwa 1998 (Agricultural Yearbook 1998), GUS, Warszawa.

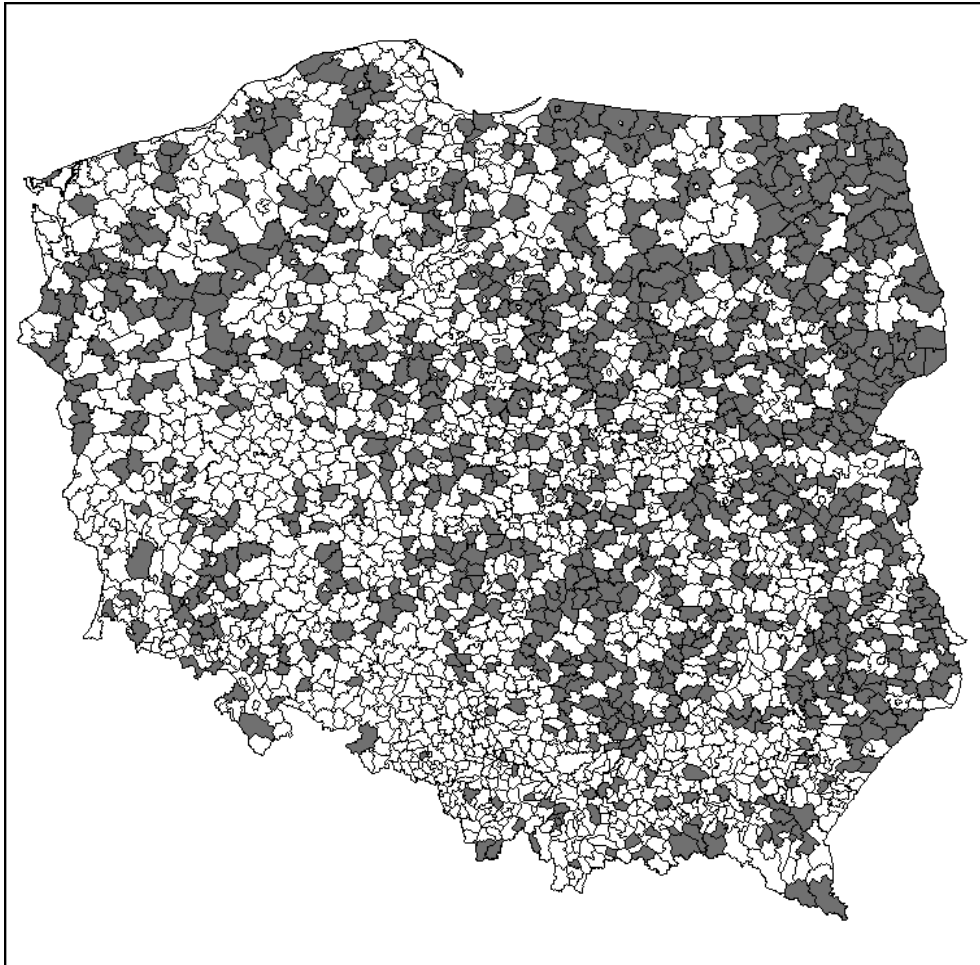
Prices of agricultural land are decisively lower and depend first of all upon land quality, location, and plot area. The average price of 1 hectare of land sold in 1998 was at about 1,000 Euro. Relatively low prices characterise the land owned by the State Treasury Agency’s Land Reserve in the former Tarnobrzeg, Chełm and Krosno voivodships (roughly 300 Euro per hectare).

The last decade of the past century was characterised – similarly as the previous years – by the outflow of population from rural areas to towns. This outflow affected mainly the young, primarily women, seeking better conditions of living.

The feminisation coefficient is usually above 100 within urban areas, and below 100 in the countryside. While the excess number of women in towns does not bring about negative processes, their shortage in rural areas is a clearly disadvantageous phenomenon. We mean here first of all the women in marital age (20–29 years), of whom one can say that they are “in short supply” over numerous rural areas (*Figure 5*). Migration of the young from the countryside contributes to the ageing of some regions of the country (*Figure 6*).

Figure 5

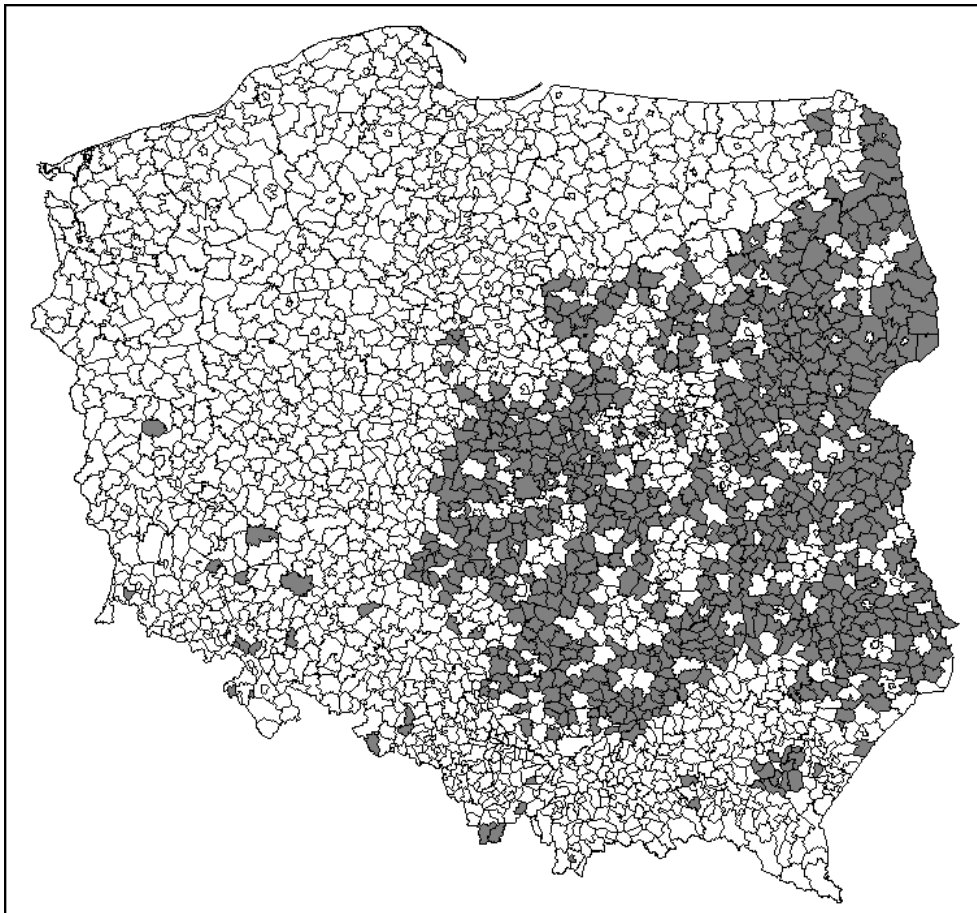
*Areas of shortage of women in the marital age
(the coefficient of feminisation of the 20–29 years age group below 90%)*



Source: edited by the author.

Figure 6

*Areas with the share of population in the post-productive age exceeding 17%
(the average for Poland: 14%), 1999*

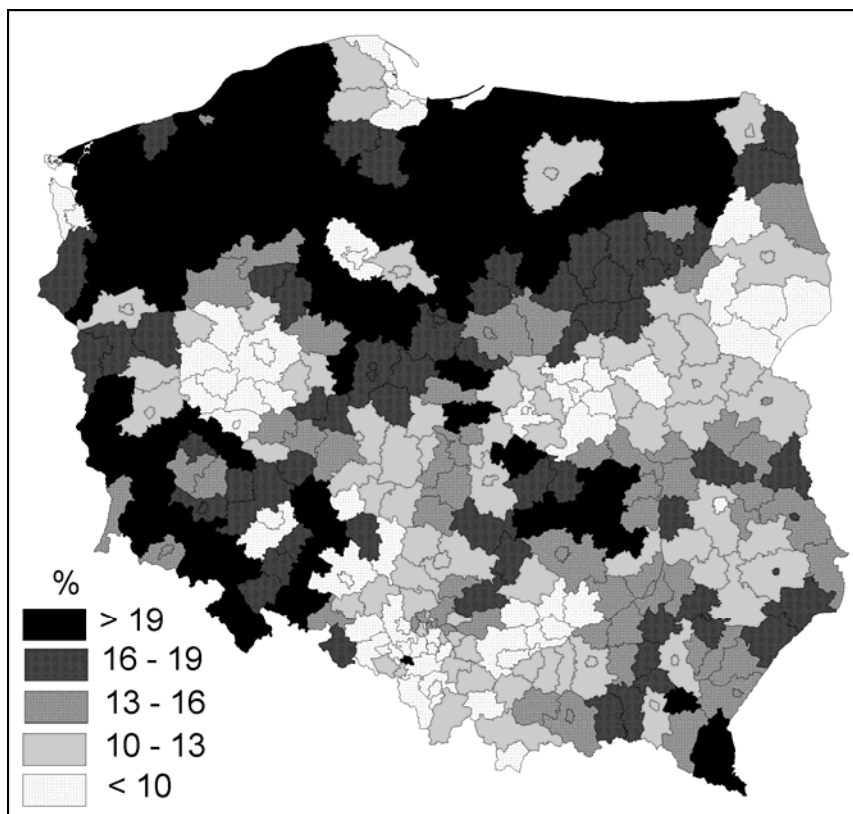


Source: edited by the author.

The most important contemporary issue in Poland is the increasing unemployment. The areas, featuring high unemployment rates (*Figure 7*), are bound for poverty and various social pathologies. Joblessness entails economic, social and political costs. Strong economic impulses are necessary that could quickly limit the reach of unemployment.

Figure 7

Unemployment rates registered according to counties, June 2000



Source: edited by the author.

The highest intensity of the persistent processes of population outflow is observed, in particular, in the regions of Podlasie, and on the Lublin Upland.³ One should account, though, also for the existence of the constant process of population outflow from rural to urban areas. Countryside is the backbone of the demographic development of the country, and so the outflow of the population from rural to urban areas ought to be regarded as a positive phenomenon. Rural overpopulation is disadvantageous, because it brings the increase of the number of farms and a decrease of their average acreage. This is not conducive to intensification and

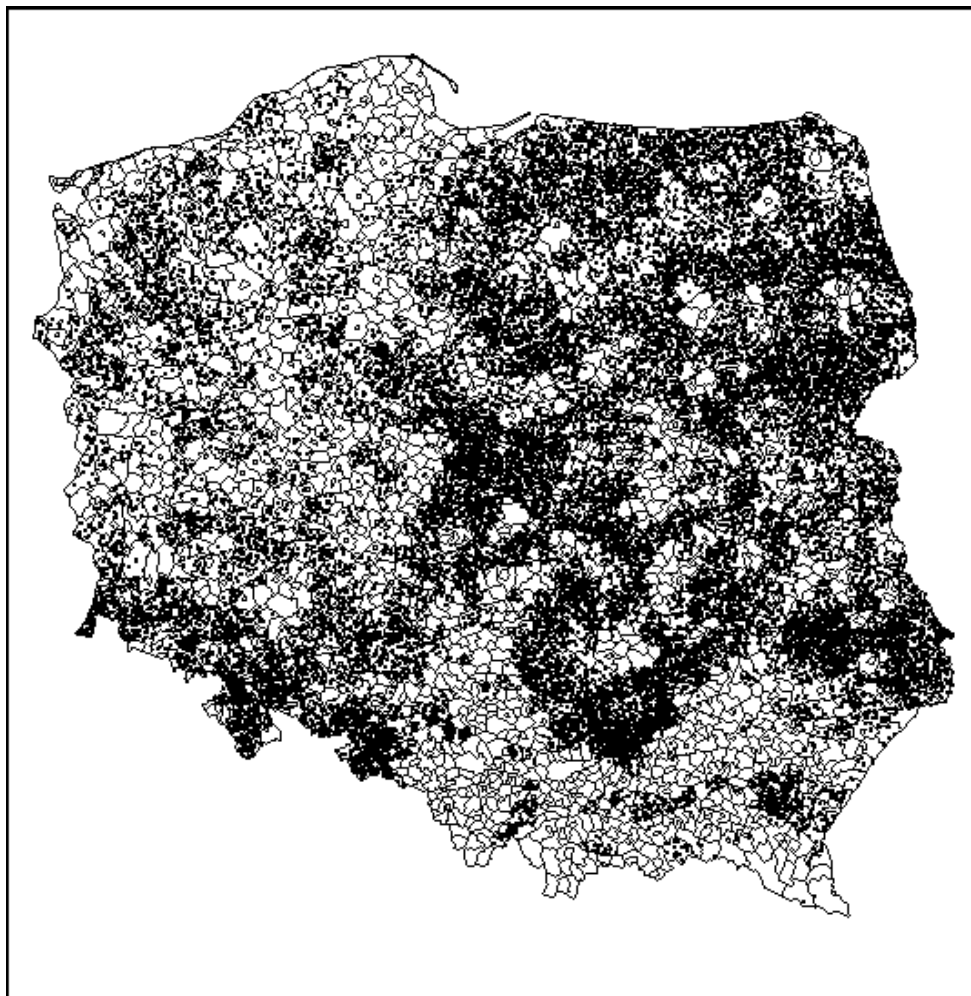
³ Eberhardt P. 1989: *Regiony wyludniające się w Polsce*, Prace Geograficzne, IGiPZ PAN, 148.

modernisation of production. The situation is opposite on the areas, where there is population decrease. It is certainly true that the most enterprising, young, and relatively well-educated persons leave the countryside. Yet, the population decrease is advantageous for the increase of farm acreage, and thereby also their modernisation and mechanisation.

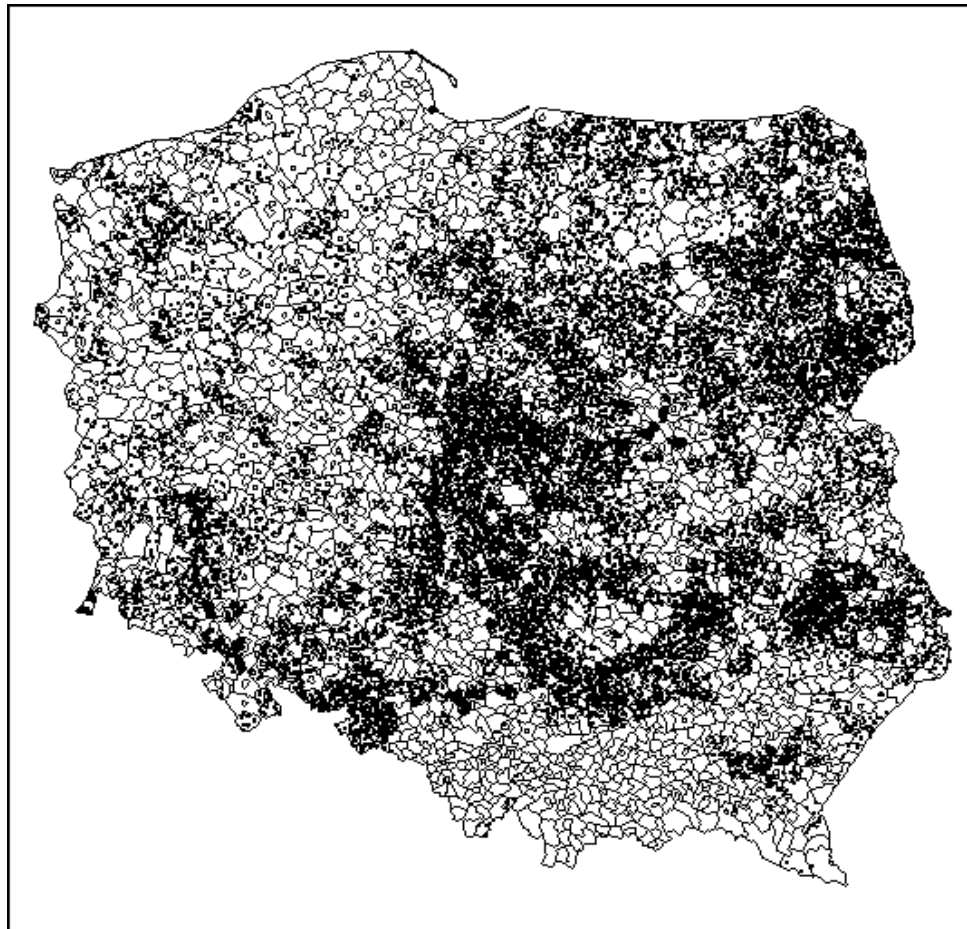
Figure 8

Areas with population decline, 1 dot – 20 persons

1970–1978



1978–1988



Source: edited by the author.

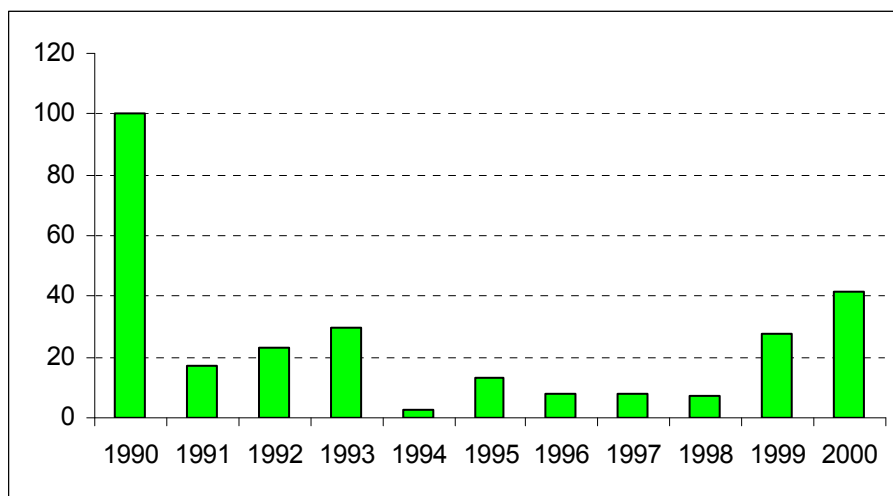
Poland and the nine other countries of Central and Eastern Europe, aspiring to the European Union, have been included, since the beginning of the 1990s, in the various pre-accession assistance programs, whose objectives are either preparation to the membership or evening out of the economic and social differences in the regional setting. Among the programs, in which Poland has been included, three – PHARE, SAPARD and ISPA – have played or should play the key role.

A large proportion of the PHARE means was directed to the broadly understood development of rural areas, although the precise determination of respective financial stream is difficult, because no concrete task of this nature was defined. It is, on the other hand, possible to estimate the sums meant for the development of farm-

ing. The PHARE assistance in this domain started already in 1990 in the form of an in-kind donation of 100 million ECU of worth, consisting of feeding stuff, mineral fertilisers, pesticides and herbicides, etc. During the subsequent years, until 1997, some 100 million Euro were disbursed for the development of agriculture.

Figure 9

PHARE means granted for the restructuring of agriculture by the EU, in million Euro (Years of Financing Memorandum: 1990–2000: Agriculture, PKE)



Source: edited by the author.

In the consecutive years the means originating from the assistance programs were gradually shifted towards the issues related to the European integration (adjustment of the legal regulations, formation of institutions, etc.). Thereby, the respective means were no longer so “visible” in the countryside, as in the preceding years.

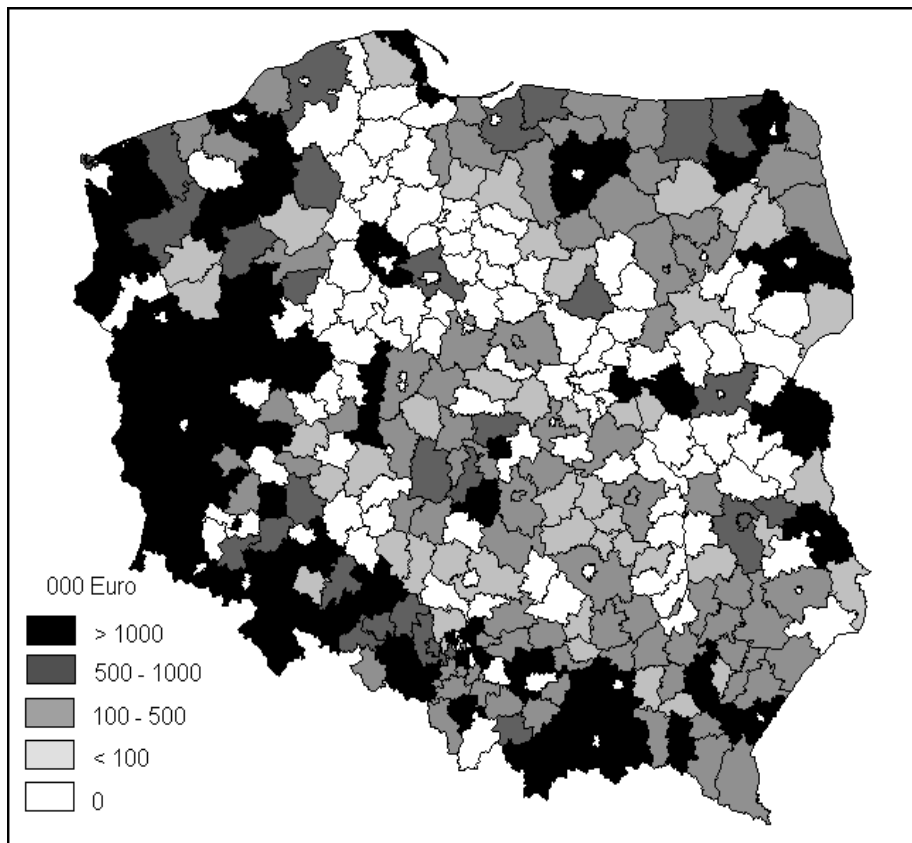
Obtaining of the assistance means depends to a large extent upon the justification and quality of the projects submitted. Hence, it is the knowledge and ingenuity of the persons asking for such means that come to the forefront. It namely turns out that the volume of the PHARE funds granted (*Figure 10*) depends upon the education level of the commune councillors (*Figure 11*), most probably to a greater degree than upon the actual needs of the individual areas.

The assistance funds were not always being used properly. The inspection carried out by NIK (the State Inspection Board) in 2000 showed that the PHARE

means have been disbursed on the entirely unnecessary reports of the consulting firms (mainly the western ones), that there are delays in realisation of the projects extending over many months, and a lot of negligence is observed. Thus, for instance, the Technical Assistance Information Exchange bureau, being an institution of the EU, envisaged for 1999 the expenditures on training, translation, database construction, etc., of more than 11 million Euro.⁴ Thereby, the funds flowing from Brussels, constituting formally assistance for Poland, would return there again. The question can therefore be posed: who does ultimately take advantage of such assistance?

Figure 10

PHARE contracts, 1995–2000

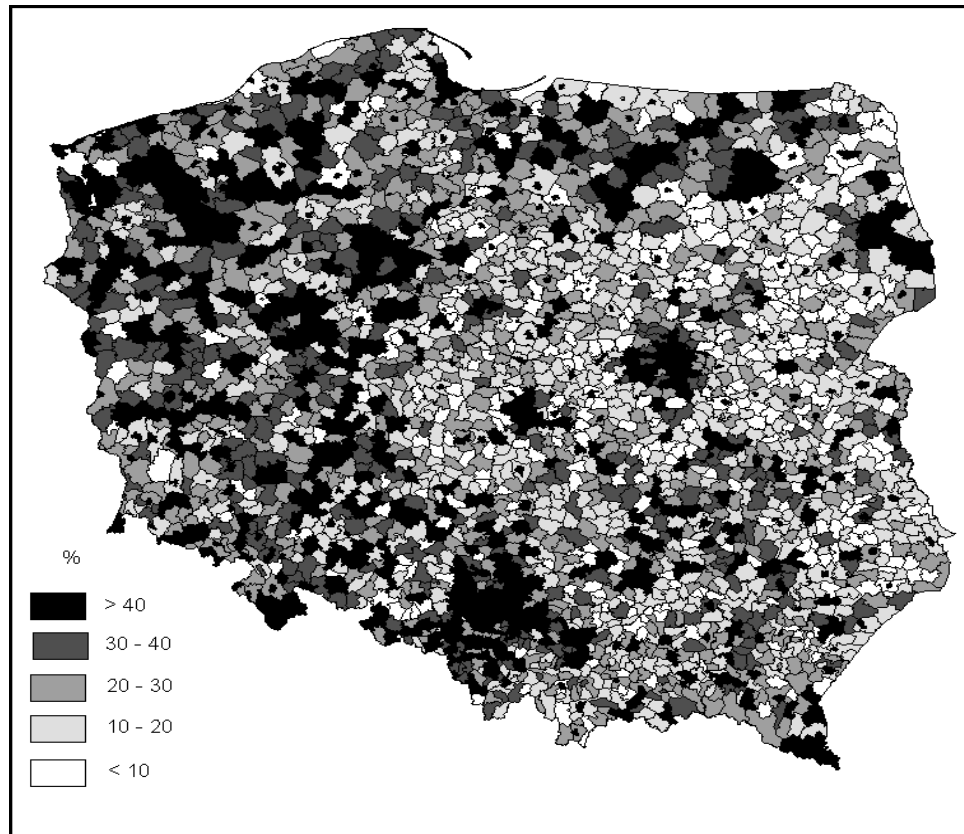


Source: edited by the author.

⁴ Europa, <http://europa.eu.int>.

Figure 11

Commune councillors with university education (%)



Source: edited by the author.

Conclusions

The development “inertia” of the rural areas is much bigger than that of towns, and so the processes of transformations, taking place after 1989, have been relatively slow in the countryside.

One should emphasise the progressing differentiation of the countryside with respect to the economic functions fulfilled. The increasing areas constitute a mixture of different functions – starting with agriculture, through forestry, down to residential function.

Table 2

*Allocation of the PHARE, SAPARD and ISPA means in 2000
 (in million Euro)*

Country	PHARE (national programs)	SAPARD	ISPA (the minimum variant)
Bulgaria	100	52.1	83.2
Czech Republic	79	22.1	57.2
Estonia	24	12.1	20.8
Hungary	96	38.1	72.8
Latvia	30	21.8	36.4
Lithuania	42	29.8	41.6
Poland	398	168.7	312.0
Romania	242	150.6	208.0
Slovakia	49	18.3	36.4
Slovenia	25	6.3	10.4
Totals	1,085	520	878.8

Source: TAIEX.

Similarly as in the previous years, the recent decade was characterised by the decrease of land under agricultural use, mainly to the advantage of forests and, to a lesser degree, the transport and housing areas. Due to the liquidation of the state farms and the privatisation processes the ownership situation on the land market changed as well.

Despite an improvement in the quality of life in the countryside there are areas, which are being left by the excessive population numbers. These are mainly young and enterprising people. Consequently, rural areas are ageing, and this is particularly visible in the East of Poland.

A new process is constituted by the growing unemployment. Jobs were first lost by the bi-occupational persons owning farms and at the same time employed outside of farming. The actual level of unemployment in rural areas is hard to estimate, since there is a significant hidden unemployment, resulting from the excess supply of manpower in farming.

The analysis of the positive and negative processes taking place in rural areas motivates to drawing the conclusion that the countryside paid a much higher price for the transformation than the town did.