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## TRANSITION PROCESSES IN SELECTED SOCIO-ECONOMIC STRUCTURES OF RURAL AREAS AND AGRICULTURE IN POLAND

### PROCESY PRZEMIAN W WYBRANYCH SPOŁECZNO-GOSPODARCZYCH STRUKTURACH WSI I ROLNICTWA W POLSCE

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**Streszczenie.** Rozwój gospodarczy na obszarach wiejskich wiąże się ze zmianami polegającymi na wzmocnieniu funkcji pozarolniczych i dezagraryzacji wiejskiej gospodarki. Poziom zaawansowania tego procesu świadczy o wielofunkcyjnym rozwoju obszarów wiejskich. Ten proces znajduje odzwierciedlenie w zachodzących zmianach w społeczno-ekonomicznych strukturach wsi i rolnictwa, a analiza tych przeobrażeń była celem opracowania. Uzyskane wyniki wskazują na wzrost ruchliwości społecznej na obszarach wiejskich, zmianę wzorca migracji na wsi, przesunięcia ludności w ramach wsi z rodzin rolniczych do bezrolnych, spadek liczby gospodarstw i procesy koncentracji, dywersyfikację aktywności ekonomicznej ludności wiejskiej i przekształcenia w źródłach utrzymania rodzin zamieszkujących wsie. Te przeobrażenia były połączone ze zmianami w wiejskiej sieci osadniczej. Stwierdzono, iż następujące zmiany strukturalne na polskiej wsi oraz w rolnictwie mają charakter trwały, wskazują na postępującą dezagraryzację, a dynamika tych przemian była wyraźnie większa po akcesji naszego kraju do UE niż po latach wcześniejszych.

**Key words:** disagrarisation, population mobility, rural areas, sources of income.

**Słowa kluczowe:** dezagraryzacja, mobilność ludności, obszary wiejskie, źródła utrzymania.

## INTRODUCTION

The socio-economic structure of rural areas is a dynamic system influenced by numerous and diverse factors, constantly interacting with one another. Accordingly, certain factors may inhibit or stimulate development in specific circumstances. Interdependence in the shaping of economic and social processes has certain features of feedback, which affects the rate and nature of changes.

The most influential factors contributing to transition processes in rural areas include migration, demographic processes (natural increase, rural population ageing) and, most importantly, the transformation in agriculture and related diversification processes with regard to professional activity of agricultural families and development of non-agricultural activity in rural areas.

Socio-economic development leads to changes within the functional structure of rural economy. Primarily, this transformation consists in expansion of non-agricultural economic functions. Development of local labour markets and non-agricultural functions is both a result and manifestation of development processes in rural areas (Adamowicz 1994).

Currently, transition processes in Polish rural areas and agriculture are predominantly influenced by the country's integration with the European Union (EU) and increasingly marked globalisation. For this reason, the first decade of the twenty-first century was a period when the development processes occurring in agriculture and rural areas in Poland were much more affected by external conditions than in the preceding years. The results included more dynamic changes not only in the agricultural sector structures, but also in all aspects of social and economic life of the entire rural population.

## MATERIAL AND METHODS

The results of fieldwork conducted by the Institute of Agricultural and Food Economics – National Research Institute constituted the basic empirical material employed to carry out this study. Those are long-term studies, conducted cyclically in the same 76 villages in various regions of the country. The tested locations were intentionally selected to reflect the actual socio-economic features of the rural areas, in particular the areal structure of all farms with an area of over 1 ha of arable land (UAA) owned by natural persons, i.e. individual farms.

For each study, the selected sample consisted of approximately 0.20% of the actual number of individual farms. For the approximation to be representative, the number of villages and the total of rural households<sup>1</sup> located in those villages were carefully considered (Karwat-Woźniak and Sikorska 2013). As a result of the basic sampling principle in terms of optimal representation of agricultural structures as well as the norm of surveying all families from the selected villages and providing for regional diversity, the villages examined primarily illustrate the processes occurring in agricultural rural areas (Sikorska 2001).

In 2011, field tests were performed upon the total of ca. 8.500 rural families, including ca. 3.300 families with an individual farmer (landowning families). As in the case of studies conducted in the previous years, these were all households located in the 76 villages examined.

For each study, the fieldwork empirical data used for the analysis concerned the marketing year, correspondingly 1999/2000, 2004/2005 and 2010/2011, briefly defined in this study as 2000, 2005 and 2011 respectively.

Information was obtained from respondents via an interview questionnaire involving interviewers instructed to convey the content of questions and register the answers in the most accurate and literal way possible. Consequently, the interviewers became a measuring instrument with a high degree of sensitivity and accuracy.

The fieldwork empirical material used for the analysis was supplemented with the results of the Agricultural Census (*Powszechny Spis Rolny, PSR*) of 2002 and 2010 as well as the representative study on agricultural farm structure of 2005 and 2007.

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<sup>1</sup> A household, as defined by the Central Statistical Office in Poland, is a group of people sharing living accommodation and income (not necessarily related or linked by any formal relationship). Single persons or persons sharing living accommodation with others, but with a separate source of income, constitute a separate, single household (Statistical Yearbook of the Republic of Poland 2012). This definition was also adopted in the fieldwork studies by the Institute of Agricultural and Food Economics-National Research Institute. Incidentally, the terms "household" is used interchangeably with "family".

Therefore, the study covers the period of 2000–2011 or 2002–2010, with a breakdown into the period before and after the accession. The adoption of such research periods resulted from the empirical material employed for this study.

Primarily, the purpose of this study was to examine the transition within selected, basic rural and agricultural structures determining the development levels of rural areas and agriculture, influenced by changes in general economic conditions which followed the integration of the Polish economy with structures, with the main focus on the disagrarisation process.

Descriptive analysis including comparative and quantitative methods was the main tool employed for this study. This was achieved with structure and intensity indicators for the phenomena examined as well as the indicators of vertical and horizontal dynamics.

## RURAL FAMILY MOBILITY

Social mobility, i.e. the movement of people in territorial space or social position, is an issue examined in terms of structural transition in agriculture and rural areas (The PWN Dictionary of Loanwords 2005).

One of the most important manifestations of population mobility in territorial terms is migration, i.e. the change of residence<sup>2</sup>. According to the survey data concerning spatial mobility, the rural communities examined were characterised by a relatively high level of territorial mobility. Migration processes were common, as they were not registered in only ca. 10% of the villages surveyed (Table 1). Furthermore, immigration increasingly prevailed over emigration in the villages examined. That was mainly due to a significant decline in the number of villages with recorded emigration, accompanied by a relatively small growth in the incidence of immigration. Between the studies of 2005 and 2011, the percentage of villages with family emigration decreased from 87 to 66%, whereas the immigration rate increased from 78 to 85%.

Table 1. The rate of spatial mobility in the villages examined in 2000–2011

Period	The percentage of villages with recorded migration		
	total	including	
		immigration	emigration
2000–2005	89.5	77.6	86.8
2005–2011	90.8	84.2	65.8

Source: on the basis of fieldwork data of the Institute of Agricultural and Food Economics-National Research Institute, 2005 and 2011.

The changes in territorial mobility in rural areas discussed above were determined by several factors, including the improvement of the level of technical and social infrastructure in rural areas, a rise in the number of local jobs and self-employed non-agricultural businesses,

<sup>2</sup> The Institute of Agricultural and Food Economics-National Research Institute studies cover all families (persons) actually inhabiting rural areas at a given moment. The survey is not based on residence registration data which constitute the basis for research conducted by the Central Statistical Office in Poland. Additionally, the census data do not provide for movements of persons who moved to another location within the same gmina, which was included in the questionnaire of the Institute of Agricultural and Food Economics-National Research Institute. Such an approach, as opposed to the methodology adopted in census research, enables identification of the actual mobility of rural population, which is frequently limited to the neighbouring areas.

the development of communication in broad terms and an increase in multifunctional rural development. In addition, the changes were to a certain extent influenced by return migration of former labour migrants.

The prevalence and intensification of trends concerning migration in rural areas is primarily documented by territorial mobility seen as the number of families who migrated to or from the villages examined (Table 2).

Table 2. The inflow and outflow of families in the villages surveyed in 2000–2011

Period	The percentage of families that					
	migrated to the examined villages			migrated from the examined villages		
	total	including		total	including	
		landowning	landless		landowning	landless
2000–2005	3.9	1.2	5.9	3.1	2.0	4.1
2005–2011	5.4	1.1	8.2	4.2	2.9	5.2

Source: on the basis of fieldwork data of the Institute of Agricultural and Food Economics-National Research Institute, 2005 and 2011.

Also, the analysis of migration indicates greater spatial mobility of landless families<sup>3</sup>. Such trends are illustrated not only by a higher percentage of emigrating and immigrating families, landless ins landowning, against the total population of the villages examined (Table 2), but also by a larger number of households in this category among the total of migrating families. In both compared periods, landless families constituted an overwhelming majority of emigrants, over 70%. In turn, the prevalence of households without land or with arable land of up to 1 ha was strengthened within groups migrating to the rural communities covered by the survey. Of the total of families migrating to the villages examined in 1996–2000, landless families accounted for almost 85%, with their share amounting to 87% in 2000–2005, and over 92% in 2005–2011. Those existing and, most importantly, growing differences show that factors influencing the extent and nature of those phenomena mostly arise from non-agricultural conditions. Traditionally, population mobility in rural areas was not related to agricultural activity since for many years, consistently, the reasons why people moved to rural areas were dominated by housing and family issues. Reasons for migration related to agricultural activity occurred sporadically (Karwat-Woźniak and Sikorska 2013).

According to the survey data, the intensification of migration in rural areas was followed by increasing number of families who migrated to the villages examined as compared to those who left the villages. In 2005–2011 the number of families who migrated to the villages was higher than the number of emigrating families by almost 28%. In 2000–2005, the according rate amounted to almost 20%.

As far as family mobility in rural areas is concerned, the direction of movement seems important as well, especially in the view of changes in the rural settlement network, that is number of families living in various rural towns. The analysis of directions of inflow to the examined villages shows that in 2005–2011 most people migrated from municipal areas,

<sup>3</sup> This term refers to landless households or households with plots up to 1 ha of UAA.

accounting for more than 59% of people migrating to the villages. Such a situation was recorded for the first time. In all the previous studies, the most frequent place of residence of the migrants was another village (Kijanowski 1998, Zwoliński 2006). The inflow from other countries, both in 2005–2011 and the previous periods, was insignificant and constituted only 2% of the total migration cases.

According to the data on the current place of residence of emigrants from the villages examined, in 2005–2011 as well as in the previous periods municipal areas were the most frequent destination, followed by neighbouring villages and other countries. In comparison with the previous study, however, the rate of migration of rural families to cities decreased by 5 pp, (from 50 to 45%), of the share of emigrants who migrated to cities. Migration to neighbouring villages declined to a greater extent. In the compared periods, the share of emigrants to other rural areas decreased by 7 pp, (from 41 to 34%). Simultaneously, the rate of external migration of rural population showed a rapid growth by more than twofold. Almost 21% of people from the families which left the villages examined in 2005–2011 migrated to another country, while the share for 2000–2005 amounted to slightly over 9%. Such a large increase can be interpreted as a result of the preceding labour emigration of individuals from these families. Those were mainly relatively young men, who, having reached economic stability, “reunited” with their family members abroad.

Population mobility may also manifest itself in socio-professional mobility, which, in the case of the rural community examined, mainly includes the status change of the family in terms of farm utilisation (Sikorska 2001).

According to the fieldwork data on socio-professional mobility of the rural community, this type of mobility has also gained in strength (Table 3). In 2005–2011, over 4% of the families surveyed in 2011 changed their socio-professional status comparing to the previous edition of the survey (2005). This means that the annual average of 0.7% of rural families changed their social status, whereas the corresponding rate for 2000–2005 constituted 0.5%.

Table 3. The rate of socio-professional mobility of the population in the villages examined in 2000–2011

Period	The percentage of families who changed their socio-professional status		
	total	including	
		landowning to landless	landless to landowning
2000–2005	3.5	5.4	2.2
2005–2011	4.4	8.9	1.0

Source: on the basis of fieldwork data of the Institute of Agricultural and Food Economics-National Research Institute, 2005 and 2011.

The analysis of socio-professional mobility of the community examined, according to distinguished categories of rural families, indicates that those changes in 2005–2011 as well as in the previous years concerned landowning families in particular, where social mobility tended to grow. Conversely, transitions from landless to landowning families were not only relatively less frequent, but they also gradually waned (Table 3).

## CHANGES IN THE SIZE AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC STRUCTURE OF THE VILLAGES EXAMINED

Trends of changes in mobility of rural communities, occurrences of force majeure<sup>4</sup> and the formation of new households within the local community<sup>5</sup> did not significantly influence the changes in the overall number of households located in the villages examined. In 2011, the average number of families per 1 of these villages amounted to 112, less by one family compared to 2005 and by two families compared to 2000. That means that in 2000–2011, the size of a statistical village covered by the survey decreased only by less than 2%.

Data analysis indicates that, despite minor changes in the statistical size of the villages examined, there were few villages with a relatively stable number of households and no net changes whatsoever in the last period examined (2005–2011), as well as in the previous years. Furthermore, it should be noted that such instances became increasingly rare, concerning less than 3% of the surveyed rural villages in 2005–2011, as compared with 8% in 2000–2005. Moreover, on average there were more villages with declining number of families than villages with increasing number of families (Table 4).

Table 4. Changes in the size (measured by number of families) of the villages examined

Period	The percentage of villages where the number of families:		
	decreased	increased	remained unchanged
2000–2005	50.0	42.0	8.0
2005–2011	57.9	39.5	2.6

Source: on the basis of fieldwork data of the Institute of Agricultural and Food Economics-National Research Institute, 2005 and 2011.

According to the collected data, despite the variability of the population number in the villages examined, the changes in the rural settlement network should be considered as relatively small. The percentage of villages with less than 50 households increased from 11 to 12% between the previous test in 2000 and 2011. In both years examined, the villages with a number of households between 50 and 99 constituted slightly more than 39%. In 2011, the share of villages with 100 to 149 families amounted to ca. 30% (an increase by over 1 pp as compared with 2005) and with 150 to 199 families constituted ca. 7% (a decrease by over 4 pp). In the latest test, large villages with 200 households or more accounted for 12% (an increase by ca. 1 pp compared to 2005) of the total number of villages where the survey was undertaken.

According to the studies, transformation in population mobility in rural areas, force majeure and formation of new households within the local community were reflected in the transition within the rural family structure with a breakdown according to the criterion of use of an

<sup>4</sup> Between the tests of 2005 and 2011, 14.1% of households covered by the 2005 survey were liquidated. The families who ceased to exist due to force majeure accounted for 38.1% of declining households (Karwat-Woźniak 2012).

<sup>5</sup> According to the fieldwork data, 4.5% of the households covered by the 2011 survey were the local community entities established after the previous study in 2005. Landless families comprised over 90% of the community. Between the studies conducted in 2000 and 2005, 3.3% of households were established among the population of the villages examined, 70% of which were landless families.

individual farm. Changes within the distinguished groups of rural families constitute one of the elements of progressing disagrarisation in Polish rural areas (Sikorska 2001, 2006 a), and also illustrate the advancement of urbanisation in rural areas. At the same time, the rate of this process affects the scope of multifunctional rural development (Chmieliński and Otlowska 2009). With knowledge of the structure of the rural community, it is possible to determine the factors fostering or delaying multifunctional development of rural areas (Sikorska 1999).

Transitions in the share of distinguished categories of rural families show, above all, stability of the long-term trend in the socio-economic structure of rural areas, consisting in a constant decline in the number of landowning families in favour of landless families (Table 5). As a consequence, the number of landless families increased by 10.1% and their share increased from 54.0 to 60.7% in 2000–2011, i.e. by 6.7 pp. This growth illustrates, inter alia, decreasing economic significance of agricultural activity for the livelihood of rural families and reduced role of agriculture as a source of employment and income for the rural population.

Table 5. Land-owning and landless families within the socio-economic structure of rural areas

Survey year	The percentage of families	
	with a farmer	without a farmer
1996	48.7	51.3
2000	46.0	54.0
2005	43.1	56.9
2011	39.3	60.7

Source: on the basis of fieldwork data of the Institute of Agricultural and Food Economics-National Research Institute, 1996, 2000, 2005 and 2011.

According to the studies, the downward trend concerning the percentage of landowning rural households was intensified in 2005–2011 as compared with the previous period examined (2000–2005). This growth should be perceived as a result of increased income opportunities for the rural population as well as the increased tendency of some farmers to take over small farm areas whose owners obtained income from non-agricultural sources. Previously, in particular before 2000, changes in the socio-economic structure of rural areas were more strongly connected with an increase in the number of families with pensioners rather than development of non-agricultural economic sectors and the expansion of earning capacity in the rural community (Sikorska 1997, 2001).

## THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE ROLE OF AGRICULTURE IN THE RURAL ECONOMY

Rural areas in Poland perform primarily agricultural functions which are not limited only to food production, while non-production functions of agriculture rise in importance (Wilkin 2009). For the last several years, agricultural activity has been superseded by other fields of economic activity in rural areas (Chmieliński 2013). This is demonstrated by a systematic increase in the number of non-agricultural business entities registered in rural areas. According to the Central Statistical Office in Poland data, there were over 998,000 non-agricultural business entities

registered in REGON register in 2011, more by 18% as compared with 2003. It should be stressed that the number of employers in rural areas increased by 49% to ca. 200.000 in 2003–2011. Simultaneously, the number of farms systematically declined. In 2002–2010, the number of individual farms deemed entities with an area of at least 1 ha of UAA under the Act on the Agricultural System declined from 1.951.700 to 1.558.400, i.e. by over 20%. Thus, the process was considerably accelerated, as the period discussed saw a 2.5% annual decline in the number of individual farms, while in the preceding decade, that indicator was two times lower (Raport z działalności Agencji... 2013).

The reduction in the number of agricultural farms was accompanied by concentration of means of production, land in particular. Results of land concentration processes in individual farming are most explicitly illustrated by the fact that the average area of all individual farms in Poland increased from 7.2 to 8.6 of UAA in 2002–2010, i.e. by over 19% and by yearly average of over 2%. Although this growth should be considered as significant if compared with the previous years, it still did not match the dynamics of this process in Western European countries (Zegar 2009).

According to the research conducted by the Institute of Agricultural and Food Economics-National Research Institute, definitely more changes in the number and areal structure of individual farms were recorded in 2005–2011 than in 2000–2005. This fact also supports the thesis that the effects of integration with the EU stimulated the activation of structural transformation in agriculture and rural areas (Sikorska 2013 a).

Changes occurring in agricultural structures were reflected by differentiation of the main functions (objectives) of individual farms, from small farms used for settlement and self-supply, to large farms capable of effective competition on the market of agricultural products.

According to the fieldwork data, introducing the Common Agricultural Policy in Poland reduced and then practically eliminated cases where functions of a given farm would be restricted solely to family settlement (Table 6). This process was accompanied by a dynamic growth (from 8 to 28%) of farms with self-supply production only. This was a continuation of long-term trends. Slightly different trends were recorded in the case of farms with mainly self-supply production, as the number of those farms stopped increasing in 2005–2011, when its share declined from 31 to 22%, below the level of 2000. At that time, individual farms supplying only minor parts of goods to the market accounted for approximately 25% of all entities. Still, the number of entities producing predominantly for the market, i.e. commercial farms, further declined from 65 to 50%. Additionally, the decline rate of commercial entities was almost two times lower after the Polish accession to the EU than in the previous years<sup>6</sup>. In 2000–2011, there was also a slight increase (from 12 to 15%) in the number of individual farms with an agricultural production rate large enough to ensure income from farming at the level at least equal to the average non-agricultural income. Admittedly, the study of 2011 indicates accelerated increase in the number of those individual farms after 2005, as compared with 2000–2005. However, the increase should still be considered as small.

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<sup>6</sup> In 2005–2011, the share of farms producing predominantly for the market decreased by an annual average of 0.95 pp, while in the period between the studies of 2000 and 2005, the corresponding indicator amounted to 1.8 pp.

Table 6. Structure of individual farms examined according to their market activity

Share (%) of:	2000	2005	2011
– farms with no agricultural production	2.8	3.7	0.3
– farms with no commodity production	7.8	9.4	27.5
– farms with commodity production	89.4	86.9	72.2
Including			
– mainly self-supply farms*	24.9	31.4	22.4
– with income from farming at the level of at least equal to average non-agricultural earnings	11.1	12.0	15.0

\* Annual sales volume of agricultural products did not exceed 20% of the average value of production per 1 farm examined. This boundary value amounted to PLN 10.000 in 2011, PLN 7.000 in 2005 and PLN 5.000 in 2000.

Source: on the basis of fieldwork data of the Institute of Agricultural and Food Economics-National Research Institute, 2000, 2005 and 2011.

Given the growing discrepancies between ownership of agricultural property and agricultural production, especially considering the rate of commercial production, the division of land-owning families by predominant source of income becomes of particular importance in the light of the study on transition of rural structures (Sikorska 2013 b). To a great extent, sources of income and their size, due to the impact on the behaviour of farms and family members, constitute fundamental criteria in studies on social and economic transitions in rural areas and agriculture (Sikorska 2006 b). At the same time, a growing number of families with non-agricultural activity as the basic source of income is an indicator of the declining role of agriculture as a field of activity and a source of income, i.e. the economic role of agriculture. It also shows that for those still committed to agriculture, their economic activity is associated mainly with the work done on the farm, so it points to the professionalization of the farming profession.

Traditionally, it is assumed that land-owning families derive their income from agricultural activity (Sikorska 2013 b). In reality, however, economic growth is followed by diversification of economic activities and, as a consequence, sources of income of agricultural population. Landowning farms obtain, apart from the income from farming<sup>7</sup>, income from non-agricultural activity (both hired labour and self-employment) and sources other than earnings (e.g. social benefits). Accordingly, a decreasing number of landowning families obtain income from a single source (Sikorska 2013 b).

In 2011, similarly as in the previous years, the income of most landowning families was determined by economic activity of family members, i.e. work on or outside a farm (Table 7). This concerned 80% of the surveyed landowning families. Another group consisted of families (19%), where the main income involved sources other than earnings. In most cases, these were pensions and disability pensions.

<sup>7</sup> Until 2004, the income from farming included income from sales of agricultural production and operations conducted on the basis of farm assets (e.g. mechanisation or agri-tourism services). Since 2005, direct payments have become an additional and by no means insignificant source of their income. Due to the nature of the data, the agricultural production income was calculated on the basis of findings of the Polish FADN, which indicate that only 40% of the sales volume of agricultural products fulfil the income function.

Table 7. Changes in the structure of examined families with individual farmers according to the source of income in 2000–2011

Year	The percentage of families with the highest income* from			
	agriculture	earnings	non-earnings	other
2000	42.7	36.3	20.5	0.5
2005	38.5	37.2	23.7	0.6
2011	34.1	46.0	19.4	0.5

\* The main source of income according to the share of income from particular sources in the overall family budget. The following groups were distinguished: agriculture – farm revenue constituted the overwhelming share of income; earnings – the main source of income came from hired labour or self-employment; non-earnings – an overwhelming source of income consisted of pensions and sources other than earnings; other – impossible to indicate the main source of income.

Source: on the basis of fieldwork data of the Institute of Agricultural and Food Economics-National Research Institute, 2000, 2005 and 2011.

The empirical data collected in subsequent years analysed indicate the advancing evolution of income structure in the landowning families examined (Table 7). This mainly consisted in the declining percentage of families for which farming was the main source of income from almost 43% in 2000 to 34% in 2011, with approximately 39% of such families in 2005. Simultaneously, there was an increase in the percentage of families with earnings as the main source of income. In 2000–2011, the percentage of families within this category increased from 36 to 46%, with 37% of such families in 2005. The increase in the percentage of earning families was a consequence of a variety of factors, most importantly structural transformation in agriculture, in particular limitation of agricultural activity by farmers pursuing non-agricultural professional activity. Compared to changes in the share of households with agriculture and earnings as the main source of income, the share of families with the main income from sources other than earnings, pensions and disability pensions in particular, was stable. Between 2000 and 2011, no change in the percentage of households whose livelihood depends on social welfare, i.e. pensions and retirements, was observed, as it merely decreased from 21 to 20% (24% in 2005). A decline of the number of landowning families in this group, recorded after 2005, should be associated with the improvement of general economic situation.

Comparison of the rate of structural transformations in landowning families distinguished according to the main source of income indicates that the dynamics of changes was considerably higher in 2005–2011 than in 2000–2005. Thus, implementing the Common Agricultural Policy in Polish agriculture has demonstrably accelerated diversification of professional activity of individual farmers' population.

According to the comparison of the number of landowning families whose income was determined by business (agricultural) activity or earnings (non-agricultural activity), the share of agricultural families obtaining income from the former source amounted to approximately 34% in 2011, i.e. it was lower by 12 pp than the percentage of earning families, which amounted to 46%. It should be stressed that the prevailing position of earning families in the total landowning families examined was recorded for the first time. Such a situation was caused by transformations occurring both within and beyond agriculture, mainly due to progressing

economic marginalisation of smaller farms in terms of area and increasing job opportunities not related in any way to farm ownership.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The conducted analyses indicate that transformations in rural areas and agriculture were mainly associated with rural population undertaking non-agricultural activities. This process was reflected by increasing percentage of landless families. As a result, the share of such families in the total number of families living in rural areas amounted to approximately 61% in 2011, compared with 57% in 2005, and 54% in 2000. These changes reflect the extent of disagrarisation of rural areas.

According to the analysis of changes in the number of rural families in 2000, 2005 and 2011, the changes in this respect were relatively minor and have basically not affected the rural settlement network. However, one may expect further concentration of families in relatively larger villages and neighbouring towns.

It was also diagnosed that the structural transformation occurring in 2000–2011 was a continuation of some pre-existing trends. In particular, this referred to the growing differentiation of rural population according to economic activity as well as differentiation regarding sources of income of rural families.

The multifunctional development of rural areas and diversification of farm functions advanced significantly in the period examined, as evidenced by the fact that in 2011, the percentage of families with agriculture as their main source of income constituted 13% of the total number of rural households examined, compared with less than 17% in 2005 and over 21% in 2000.

A decrease in the number of individual farms and land concentration occurring in this community indicate positive changes and bode well for the productivity growth in material factors of production as well as more effective use of economies of scale to improve competitiveness of Polish farms. Still, what remains a distinctive feature and a weakness of domestic agriculture is its excessive fragmentation in terms of area and the resultant small output of a relatively large group of farms (Karwat-Woźniak 2013).

Changes in the areal structure reflected the growing differentiation of the main functions (objectives) of farms, from small farms used for settlement and self-supply to large farms capable of effective competition on the market. Consequently, the share of farms with commodity production decreased by 15 pp in 2000–2011 and amounted to 50% in 2011.

The share of landless families in the number of rural households has systematically increased for several years, thus affecting the role of this socio-economic group in the development of the local community. At the same time, economic transitions, being the effect of the system transition and Poland's membership in the European Union, changed the image attached to the social status of landowning and landless families.

The analysis of transformation taking place in rural areas and agriculture leads to the conclusion that the changes have been continuous, gradually becoming more intense. Also,

it should be stressed that the dynamics of those transitions was considerably higher after the accession to the EU than in the previous years.

The changes presented, including the growth of non-agricultural functions of rural areas and the disagrarisation of their rural economy are universal regularities resultant from economic development processes. However, in Polish conditions, in the course of these processes some differences occur in comparison with the corresponding changes in more economically developed countries. These changes are primarily expressed in people's withdrawal from agricultural activity and the decline within the sector that accompany multifunctional rural development.

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