

Grzegorz Zabłocki

**The State of Rural Sociology as Presented
in Four Periodicals – Rural Sociology,
Sociologia Ruralis, Journal of Rural Studies,
Eastern European Countryside**

Abstract

This article is an analysis of differences and similarities between four English-language journals on rural sociology. The comparison covered topics discussed in about 600 articles published in the journals in the years 1995–2010 and the regional affiliation of their authors. In the comparison, all articles and texts on empirical research published in this period in *Eastern European Countryside* were considered. In total, 141 texts were published in this annual journal. Out of the three other journals (*Rural Sociology*, *Sociologia Ruralis*, *Journal of Rural Studies*) 50 articles for each of three periods: 1995–1996, 2002–2003, 2008–2009, were selected.

Results of the comparison show that the journals have strictly regional profiles, and that present rural sociology does not seem to be the science on social phenomena in world-wide rural areas. Rural sociology used in the four studied journals does not develop the knowledge that would be useful in solving problems of the rural population. In the three journals under study (*Rural Sociology*, *Sociologia Ruralis*, *Journal of Rural Studies*) almost exclusively sociology of rural areas in Western Europe and Northern America was developed, and their contributors were almost always authors from the two regions. The fourth journal – *Eastern European Countryside* – was concerned, adequately to its title, with rural phenomena in Central and Eastern Europe.

Keywords: rural sociology, regional journals, Central and Eastern Europe, content analysis.

Introduction

Eastern European Countryside has been coming out for 20 years. That allows for the comparison and evaluation of the periodical as well as an evaluation of the state of the discipline within which it functions.

This paper is primarily an analysis of the similarities and differences between four English language academic periodicals which aim to present the top quality achievements of institutions and people engaged in sociological analysis and research of processes taking place in rural areas and agriculture. Two of the periodicals represent associations which are of great importance to the global image of rural sociology: *Rural Sociology* is the quarterly of the American Association of Rural Sociology which has been coming out for almost 80 years, and *Sociologia Ruralis* is the quarterly of the European Association of Rural Sociology which has been coming out for over 50 years. The third periodical, *Journal of Rural Studies*, is an esteemed quarterly published by Elsevier Publishers since 1985 which concentrates on the question of rural sociology. Whereas *Eastern European Countryside* is an annual published at Nicolas Copernicus University in Toruń.

The idea of comparing these periodicals also emerged to evaluate the state of rural sociology – an academic discipline whose achievements are presented in these periodicals. Do the articles published in them cover a similar collection of phenomena and processes, considered as the subject matter of rural sociology? There are reasons to doubt that as there have long been considerable differences in the evaluation of specific phenomena and processes taking place in rural communities. An expression of these differences is the disparity (formulated for over 50 years) in naming the discipline they go in for: although everyone says they glean from the achievements of rural sociology, they in fact call their discipline the sociology of rural areas, environmental sociology, agricultural sociology, the sociology of traditional societies or the sociology of managing natural resources. To what extent do the editorial teams of these periodicals make use of a common perspective in perceiving and clarifying current social

processes taking place outside the urban agglomerations? Do they describe their subject in a similar way?

Another reason for comparing the subject matter of these four periodicals is the recent, spectacular and highly significant rejection of long-standing attempts at collective management in agriculture. These attempts took place on almost all the continents, affecting about a quarter of the world population and in some cases lasted almost 70 years. They ended with a return to the market economy and the decline of political forces referring to socialist ideology. It is worth checking how the results of that social experiment (ended over 20 years ago) are perceived in periodicals concentrating their attention on rural communities, i.e. those which in many countries were and in others could be encompassed by such forms of agricultural production.

The transformation of countries moving away from the centrally planned economy is also an opportunity to look for the principles of a peaceful move of societies to systems with more democratic political procedures. The societies of Central Europe were not the first in this process. Examples of earlier democratisation in Europe were given by Greece, Portugal and Spain but the changes taking place in the 1990s in the countries of the former communist bloc are worth noticing due to their high number and diversity of societies taking part, which means that their experiences are more useful for those who would like to follow their example. An analysis of the changes of the political and economic positions of the rural population in societies democratizing their political procedures would allow for the establishment of whether and to what extent the traditionally worse position of rural inhabitants in comparison with their urban counterparts has improved as a result of the democratisation of political procedures. That knowledge could help attain a more complete realisation of socially required goals through similar social movements, for example in modern northern Africa. Were the changes in the position of rural populations in societies undergoing a system transformation followed up in these periodicals and what are the results of that research?

Comparative Methodology

A comparison of the areas of interest of these periodicals in the years 1995–2010 was undertaken on the basis of assigning the subject matter of

the articles and works reporting the results of empirical research (further: articles), published in these periodicals to a collection of 28 categories. The basis of assigning the topic of a given article to a specific category was the content of its abstract and title, and in the absence of an abstract – the title and overview of the whole article or its opening fragments.¹

The periodical which made its pages available to the lowest number of articles in the analysed period was the annual *Eastern European Countryside* (further *EEC*), during which 141 articles were published in it.² The same number of articles was published in each of the other periodicals over a period of 6 years. Therefore, all the *EEC* articles were used for the comparison, dividing them into 3 periods: 1995–1999, 2000–2004 and 2005–2010; in those periods 44, 52 and 45 articles appeared respectively. The same number of articles was used for each of the other periodicals in 1996–1997 (the first period), 2002–2003 (the second period) and 2008–2009 (the third period), omitting a few special issues which appeared in those years (2/2002 and I/2003 – *JRS*).³ As a result, over 560 articles were

¹ The numbers which were used for further research showing the frequency of a given topic in the articles from a given period were acquired by assigning a ‘main topic’ and a ‘supporting topic’ (both from the collection of 28 categories, the ‘supporting topic’ being a repetition of the ‘main topic’ in few cases), the summing up of the number of appearances of each of the 28 categories and then dividing those numbers in two. Categories for a given periodical and a given period with a result below unanimity were omitted. Such a method of establishing the subject matter of articles does not provide results consonant with other methodologies, e.g. those using key-words or a subject assigned to the articles in electronic databases. Attempts at applying such other methods did not give satisfactory results. E.g. in the EBSCO database in articles in *Rural Sociology* from 1995–2002 the subject of ‘rurality’ was given to 4 articles, and the word ‘rurality’ was used in 16 articles from that period. However, in the next period 2003–2010 this subject was not given to any articles, in spite of the fact that the word ‘rurality’ was used in almost twice as many articles (27 articles). Similar disparities were obtained during attempts to use key-words given to articles by authors and also many articles (mainly in 1995–1999) did not have key-words.

² That research did not include the pilot issue of *EEC* which appeared in 1993, but issues 1 – 16 published between 1995 and 2010.

³ The special issue 3/2008 of *Sociologia Ruralis* was not omitted. It was devoted to sustainable rural development, as without that issue the total number of texts in that periodical in 2008–2009 would have been lower than 40. Whereas 44 articles included in the *JRS* in 1996–1997 came from issues 1–4 in 1996 and issues 1–2 in 1997. Likewise 51 articles included in *JRS* in 2008–2009 came from issues 3–4 in 2008 and issues 1–3 in 2009 (issues 2/2008 and 4/2009 of that periodical were special ones).

the subject of that research and each periodical in each of those periods had 41 to 52 articles (47 on average).

The collection of 28 categories was selected in such a way so as to adequately reflect the subject matter of the articles in each of the periodicals while also enabling the verification of a few hypotheses about the change in interest in individual issues in the later analysed periods, environmental protection, sustainable development, globalisation, family farms, social capital, the multi-functionality of rural areas and the wide variety of sources of income of rural inhabitants, legal protection, the wellbeing of animals etc.

The Topics of Articles in *RS*, *SR*, *JRS* and *EEC*

The widest disparity between the periodicals concerns the changes which started taking place in the countries of the former communist bloc at the beginning of the 1990s. These were mainly changes in the political system, which led to considerable changes in the principles of functioning of a large part of the rural population in those countries, firstly those who had been included in the collective farming system. Almost half of the 44 articles published in the first analysed period (1995–1999) in *EEC* were devoted to those changes.⁴ Not a single article on that topic appeared in either *Rural Sociology (RS)* or *Sociologia Ruralis (SR)* in the same number of articles during that period (1996–1997). There was only one in the *Journal of Rural Studies (JRS)*.

The concentrated attention of *EEC* on issues regarding transformation taking place in the rural areas of Central and Eastern Europe and the privatisation of the productive assets in those countries, dropped in the later analysed periods. In 2000–2004 *EEC* devoted 1 in 7 of the 52 articles to these processes and in 2005–2010 only 1 in 15. Interest in these processes in the other 3 periodicals did not grow: *RS* did not include a single article on that subject, *SR* included 1 and *JRS* added 1 in the first period and 3 in the second (2000–2004, precisely 2002/2003) and omitted this subject in the third period. So the processes with a dominant significance for the

⁴ Barbara Weber drew attention to the high number of texts in *EEC* devoted to transformation and privatisation in the first singled out period in her text in issue 10/2004 of *EEC* [Weber, 2004:7].

functioning of rural inhabitants in an area covering half of Europe did not capture the attention of 2 important rural sociology periodicals, i.e. the periodical of the European Association of Rural Sociology and to a small extent of another European periodical (*JRS*). If not for *EEC* it could be assumed that rural sociologists were not interested in what was happening in most of Asia and in the part of Europe to the east of the river Laba,⁵ the territory surrounding Berlin, Budapest and Prague as well as processes taking place there were 'terra incognita' to European and world (English-speaking) rural sociology.

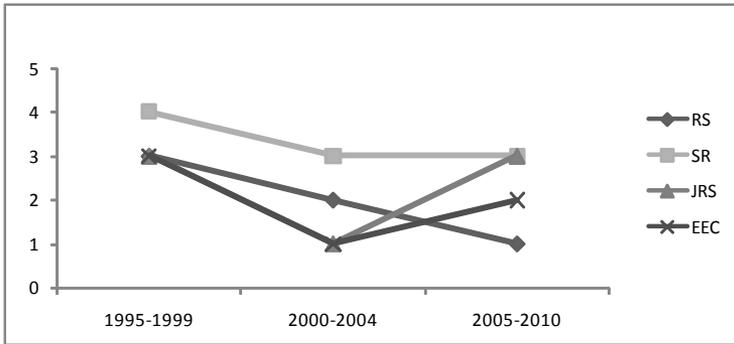
The enlargement of the European Union in 2004, which meant the inclusion of 10 nations from Central Europe within its structures, did not arouse a much greater response in the analysed periodicals. This phenomenon was not the topic of a single article of over 400 published in 3 periodicals (*RS*, *SR*, *JRS*) during the analysed period. The number of articles devoted to this process by *EEC* was not high but at least 1 article was devoted to it in each of the 3 periods. It is worth underlining that as a result of this process the EU enlarged its area by a third and its population by almost a third, mostly rural population. Therefore, the lack of analysis of the role of this process by 2 'European' periodicals (*SR* and *JRS*) is surprising.

Equally, interest in the EU Common Agricultural Policy in the analysed periodicals was not significant: a lack of articles on the subject in *RS*, in the other 3 (*SR*, *JRS* and *EEC*) there were few such articles. *SR* wrote about the EU agricultural policy relatively more often, devoting 4 articles in the entire analysed period.

The level of interest in family farms in each of the periodicals was balanced. Moreover, articles on this topic appeared equally frequently in each of the analysed periods. This important, traditional topic of interest for rural sociology emerges here as a theme linking the 4 periodicals although this subject matter was the central theme in relatively few articles, representing approximately 5% of all the analysed articles. The frequency of this topic in the analysed periodicals is shown in the graph below.

⁵ The conclusions of a conference held in Podbanske (Slovakia) on 6–9 December 1999 deny that. The participants emphasized the need for research about the changes taking place in the rural areas of Central and Eastern Europe and pointed out the main themes of that research [Brown and Bandlerová 2000: 151].

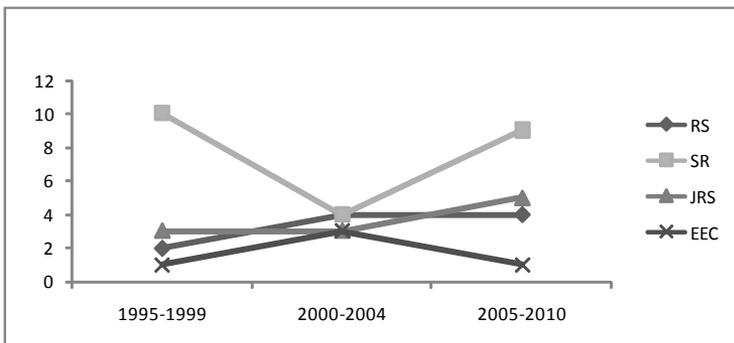
Figure 1. Subject – Family farms



Source: own research, 2012.

A relatively frequent topic of the articles was a group of issues, including environmental protection and pollution, sustainable development, various versions of ecological agriculture and ecological food. In each of the analysed periods about 10% of the articles were devoted to these issues, the highest being in *SR*,⁶ the lowest in *EEC*. The graph below shows the diverse frequency in dealing with these issues.

Figure 2. Subject – Nature, organic farming and sustainable development

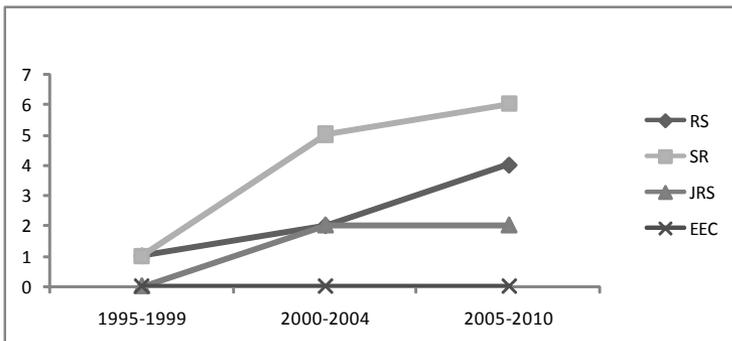


Source: own research, 2012.

⁶ The high level of interest of *SR* in these topics in the third of the analysed periods is partly due to including articles from the special issue 3/2008 of *SR*, largely devoted to them.

An area which attracted growing interest during the analysed periods were the questions of current agro-industrial systems and applied technologies in food production, including the problems of guaranteeing high quality food. In the first period there are practically no texts on this issue, whereas in the following 2 periods they were relatively numerous. There were no articles on this topic in *EEC* as if those themes in that periodical were considered as pertaining to industrial or commercial sociology rather than rural sociology. Whereas they appeared more frequently in *SR* and *RS* as can be seen in the graph below. The data do not take into account articles from the special issue of *JRS* 1/2003, which was devoted to the alternative networks of agri-food production. If these articles were to be taken into account, the level of interest of *JRS* in this subject matter in 2000–2004 was highest.

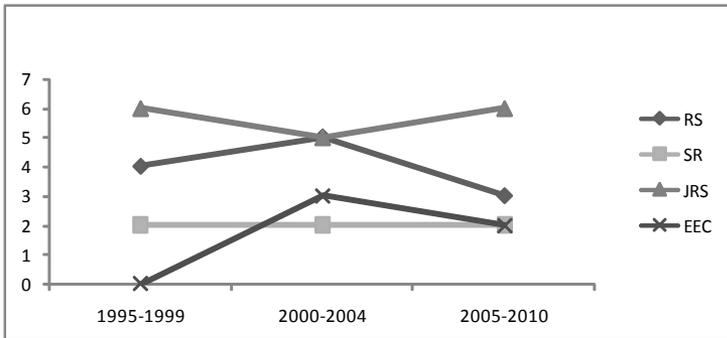
Figure 3. Subject – Agri-food systems



Source: own research, 2012.

The diverse and growing interest in current agri-industrial systems and modern food production technologies was not connected with the frequency of publishing articles devoted to globalisation. Texts on that topic appeared rarely in each of the periodicals and with a similar frequency in the compared periods. There was far greater interest in the economic effects of farming in rural areas. Less than 1 in 10 articles covered those issues in each of the analysed periods, less frequently in *SR* or *EEC*.

Figure 4. Subject – Economic effects

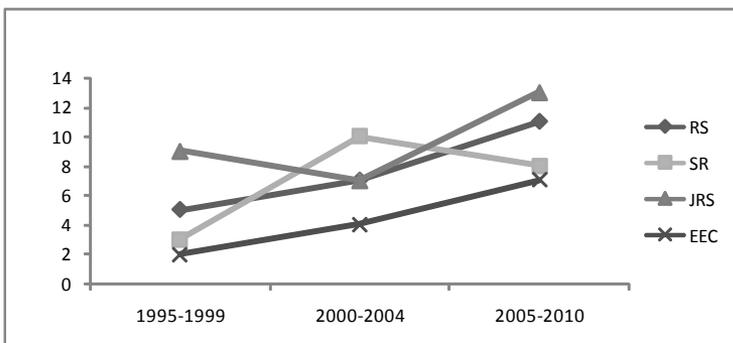


Source: own research, 2012.

There was slightly less interest yet with a similar structure in migration and the demographic process as well as in the level of awareness and opinions of various groups of inhabitants in rural areas.

There was a systematic growth in the number of articles about processes taking place in the local communities, the social and political activity of the members of the those communities, the networks of local cooperation and rivalry. In the first period about 10% of the articles were devoted to those issues and in the third about 20%. The graph below shows the level of interest in this subject matter.

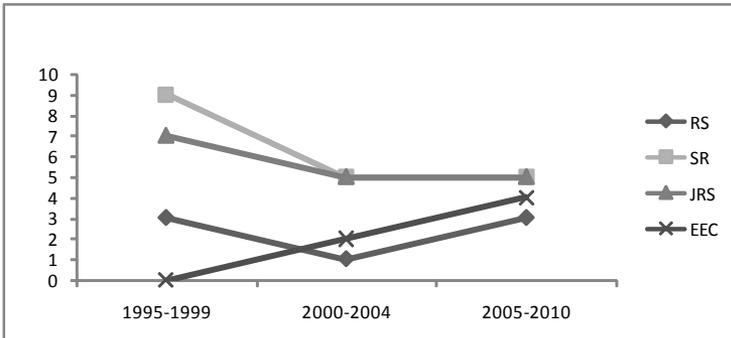
Figure 5. Subject – Communities



Source: own research, 2012.

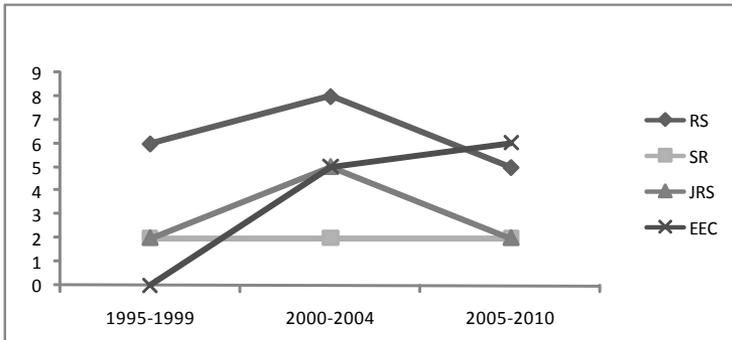
Describing and clarifying the processes taking place in rural areas was also connected with pointing to the government and state institutions as the actors on which so many of these processes depended. The articles devoted to the role of the state (including its role as a result of the deregulation of the economy) were less frequent than those about the social and political activity in local communities. A greater interest in the role of the state appeared in *EEC*, although if the concentration of that periodical during the first period on the processes of transformation and privatisation can be connected with activities of the state authorities, maintaining that the growing interest in the role of the state in processes described in *EEC* would be unjustified. The graph below does not include articles which concerned the system change and privatisation.

Figure 6. Subject – State



Source: own research, 2012.

The subject matter which was covered more frequently in *EEC* in the second and third period concerned social inequality, poverty, marginalisation and social exclusion among various groups in the rural population. This subject was always present in the other 3 periodicals, whereas it only appeared in the second period in *EEC* – as if these phenomena were nonexistent or insignificant in the first period, i.e. in 1995–1999. It is puzzling that the theme of social inequality, poverty, marginalisation and social exclusion appeared more frequently in all 3 periods in *RS* than in *SR* or *JRS*.

Figure 7. Subject – Inequalities

Source: own research, 2012.

EEC stood out for its interest in the changes in ways of using arable land and its structure, the functioning of cooperatives as well as the socio-economic structure of rural inhabitants and their sources of income (these questions were covered least frequently by *SR*).

In the 4 periodicals the level of interest in social capital, multi-functionality of rural areas and the wide variety of sources of rural family incomes, as well as the importance of tourism and leisure in rural areas was equally low (such articles appeared in the 2nd and 3rd period). Few articles discussed these issues and the small differences between the periodicals could be noticed in a slightly higher level of interest of *JRS* in multi-functionality and slightly higher interest of *EEC* in tourism.

Under 10% of the articles were devoted to theoretical and methodological problems of rural sociology, the upper limit being slightly higher in *RS*. Interest in the social aspects of gender differences was twice as low in the periodicals, growing in *EEC* while falling in *RS*. The 4 periodicals did not devote many articles to the historical conditions of processes taking place in rural areas. Of all the texts there were about 5% such articles, *JRS* showing a growing tendency on this topic and *EEC* a falling one.

In the titles of a few articles there were words such as unemployment, animal rights, animal welfare, animal well-being but the methodology used for establishing the subject matter led to the conclusion that articles devoted to these issues in the discussed periods were in fact non-existent.

Despite their differences, the 4 analysed periodicals should be considered similar to one another, at least as far as the content of their articles is concerned. The assumption that each of them is active primarily in the area traditionally associated with rural sociology can be confirmed. Will similar conclusions result from the analysis of physical, geographic territories described in each of the periodicals and from the analysis of the national identity of the authors of these articles?

The Researched Territories and the Territorial Identity of the Authors Writing in the 4 Periodicals

Readers of these periodicals know about the differences in frequency of references to data and research carried out in different parts of the world and that the authors come from different parts of the world. *Rural Sociology* traditionally concentrates on the United States, *Sociologia Ruralis* focuses most of its attention on Great Britain. The *Journal of Rural Studies* concentrates mainly on Western Europe. *Eastern European Countryside* outlined its distinctive scope of objectives, its very title highlighting the area of interest. It would be significant if 3 periodicals with the exception of *EEC* could be considered as representing the oeuvre of rural sociology in the widest possible sense, i.e. globally. Do they really include in their texts reports about the most important rural global social phenomena and their sociologically most innovative analyses?

Answering these questions is easier than establishing the subject matter the periodicals focused on. They provided the institutional identity of almost all the authors of the articles (often the academic institutions the author was connected with), similarly with establishing the research location (or what area the data covered), which the given article gave information about.

The differences between the 4 periodicals are considerable in this regard. Out of 143 articles in *RS* only 13 had authors from outside USA (5 were Canadian, 2 Australian). 13 articles had co-authors from outside USA (5 were representatives from Canada). The rest, i.e. 120 articles had authors who were exclusively from USA.

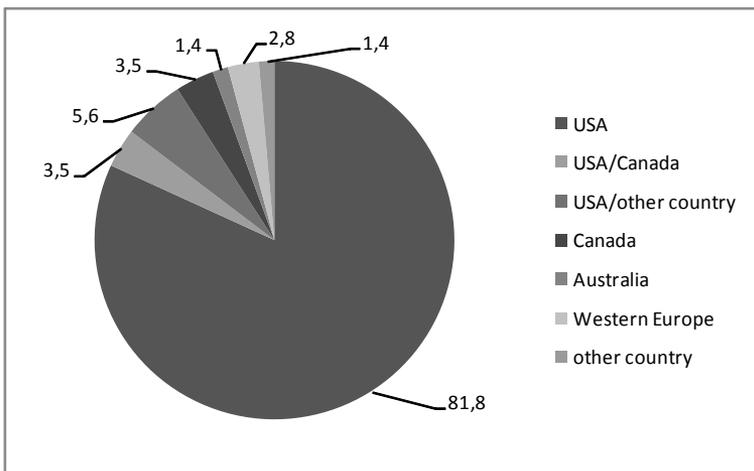
SR and *JRS* are primarily interested in Western Europe and then with the economically developed, English-speaking countries – USA, Australia,

Canada and New Zealand. There are very few exceptions to this rule. The authors of almost 100 out of 132 analysed articles in *SR* were from Western Europe (the authors of 40 articles being from the UK, 12 from Greece, 11 from Norway). The authors of 12 articles were from USA, 8 from Australia, 7 from Canada, 3 from New Zealand. Only 3 authors of the articles were from Central Europe. 3 articles were by authors from other non-European countries (Brazil and South Africa).

The authors of almost 80 of 144 articles in *JRS* were from Western Europe (UK – 51 articles, Norway – 5 articles, Finland – 5 articles). The authors of 20 articles were from USA, 14 articles – from Canada, 13 articles – from Australia and 6 from New Zealand. Only 2 articles were written by people from outside the mentioned territories (South Africa and Hong Kong).

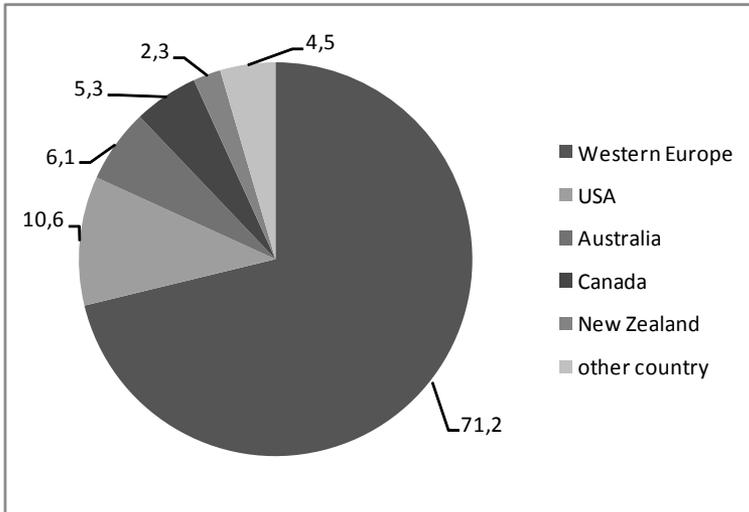
One of the co-authors of 2 articles was from Central and Eastern Europe (from Russia and Bulgaria) and one co-author of another 3 articles from Mexico, Thailand and Argentina.

Figure 8. Articles in Rural Sociology according to authors and co-authors



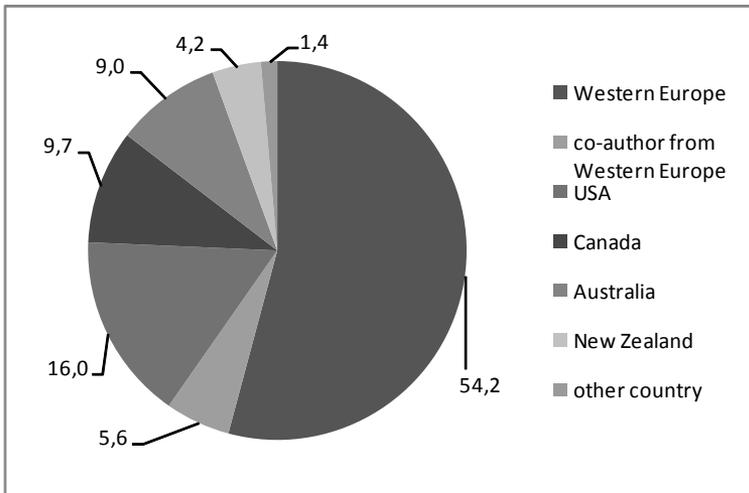
Source: own research, 2012.

Figure 9. Articles in Sociologia Ruralis according to authors and co-authors



Source: own research, 2012.

Figure 10. Articles in Journal of Rural Studies according to authors and co-authors



Source: own research, 2012.

The regional identity of the authors publishing in *EEC* is justified by a clear, geographical definition of the territory which the papers in that periodical are about. Over half of the 140 articles in *EEC* were written by authors from Central and Eastern Europe (29 articles – Poles, 15 – Hungarians, 8 – Russians, 7 – Czechs). However, the authors of almost a third of all the articles in *EEC* were people from Western Europe and USA (Germany – 13 articles, UK – 8, Finland – 6, USA – 3). If one adds to that 18 articles whose co-authors were from USA (there were 10 such articles) or Western Europe, it appears that in the case of 60 out of 140 articles the author or co-author was from either Western Europe or USA. It seems that *EEC* is the most open periodical with regard to authors from outside the territory that the articles published in it are about.

The regional character of the analysed periodicals does not undergo significant change after analysing the regions of the world which the articles in them were about. 80% of the 124 articles in *Rural Sociology* which referred to a specific part of the world were about the United States. Of the remaining 24 articles 5 were about Canada, and the rest about other regions of the world (only 1 was about a country from within Central and Eastern Europe, i.e. Russia). The articles in *Sociologia Ruralis* often referred to phenomena and research in the UK, next in line came the rest of Western Europe and finally the English speaking countries which are or were members of the Commonwealth. Of almost 100 articles in *Sociologia Ruralis* (from 1996/1997, 2002/2003 and 2008/2009) 23 concerned the UK, 14 – EU, 12 – Greece, 6 – Australia, 5 – New Zealand, 4 – USA and 2 – Canada. Only 11 articles referred to countries outside Western Europe or those already mentioned, of them 6 referred to phenomena in Central and Eastern Europe.

The structure of regions described in the *Journal of Rural Studies* is similar. Of 127 articles which were about a specific area, 34 concerned the UK, 17 – USA, 13 – Australia, 10 – Canada, 7 – New Zealand and 7 – the EU. Only 17 articles were not about Western Europe or areas already mentioned, of those 7 referred to Central and Eastern Europe.

The already mentioned fact that the authors or co-authors of almost half of the articles in *EEC* were people from outside Central and Eastern Europe is of particular significance if that is compared with data about authors in the remaining 3 periodicals. Authors from outside the territory which the given periodical focused on, wrote in them: authors from USA and Canada

generally wrote about USA and Canada, authors from Western Europe mainly wrote about Western Europe. Sometimes authors from Australia or New Zealand joined that circle. The articles in those 3 periodicals give the impression that at least 1 of the following circumstances had taken place:

- a) the social phenomena in the rural areas apart from the 2 mentioned regions did not in fact deserve the attention of rural sociology periodicals,
- b) social phenomena in the rural areas outside the two mentioned areas were not in fact analysed or researched by anyone in a way as is done within the framework of rural sociology (and that is why in rural sociology periodicals articles about these analyses or research are lacking).

If however, one adds to the above 2 circumstances the observation that the results of research on such areas carried out by rural sociologists in Central and Eastern Europe, Latin America, India, Japan or China were scarcely published in *RS*, *SR* or *JRS*, then the conclusion that perhaps for those 3 periodicals rural sociology meant only whatever referred to the USA or Western Europe and an article in a rural sociology periodical could only be a text whose author or co-author represented the USA or Western Europe. Exceptions to this rule were very rare in the 3 discussed periodicals.

However, considering that the authors or co-authors of almost half of the articles published in the entire period 1995–2010 in *EEC*, which referred to phenomena taking place in Central and Eastern Europe, were people from Western Europe and USA, the following conclusion can be made:

- a) the social phenomena in rural areas outside Western Europe and USA were interesting for rural sociologists (rural sociologists from USA and Western Europe were interested in them),
- b) social phenomena in rural areas outside Western Europe and USA were analysed and researched as is done by rural sociologists (they were analysed and described in *EEC* by rural sociologists from Western Europe and USA).

Therefore, the fact that in *RS*, *SR* and *JRS* the areas outside Western Europe, USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand were written about very rarely and when that did occur, the authors or co-authors of those articles were often people from the mentioned regions, points to the regional

character of these periodicals. They portrayed 2 or 3 relatively small areas of the world and portrayed them through the eyes of specialists from those 2 or 3 regions.

That state of affairs did not change. In the later analysed periods the number of articles referring to other regions and the number of articles written by authors from other regions continued to be very low.

Summary – Who Needs what Kind of Rural Sociology?

The presented analyses show that to a certain extent the 4 compared periodicals cover similar phenomena and social processes, with the exception of the system transformation and privatisation often discussed in *EEC*, and almost nonexistent in *RS*, *SR* and *JRS*. The main focus of these periodicals as in rural sociology was supposed to be the phenomena and social processes taking place in rural areas. They are only really the focus of those periodicals if they actually take place in Western Europe or USA (and were also researched by people from those 2 regions).

Such practice could be justified if it were considered that changes in the world's rural areas take place according to one common scenario where what has occurred in the most developed regions of the world, will repeat itself after some time in less developed regions; privatisation and transformation in Central Europe being a short episode restoring the development of this region to a pattern in accordance with one universal scenario. However, it is difficult to accept such a point of view considering that the less developed regions do not have access to such abundant natural resources which the most developed regions have made use of until now [World 1987], and relations between the regions of the modern world are often of a centre – periphery character [Wallerstein 2003]. How can one evaluate a situation when the real focus of attention of the 3 best known rural sociology periodicals are Euro-American rural areas (described by Euro-American authors)? Is such a form of handling rural sociology useful in the distinction and solution of significant problems of the current inhabitants of rural areas?

If the aim of sociological cognition is the acquisition of knowledge about society, helpful in solving its significant problems, it is a matter of discussion of the extent to which that cognition concentrates its attention

on Western Europe and USA helps solve social problems in regions of the world which are poorly or less economically developed.⁷ Does it help outline directions which will permanently improve living conditions in those regions without destabilising the climate or excessively exploiting the world's natural resources?

If such were to be the central problem of modern global society, the numerous issues currently absorbing the attention of wealthy societies would be of little significance. The ways of development followed by wealthy societies should not and cannot be repeated by poor societies – that is why the knowledge about what and how things happen in wealthy societies, is not very useful in solving the problems of poor societies and may even be used to maintain them in the false conviction about the direction of future development.

Hence rural sociology periodicals which regionalists have not made their official, essential trait, should recognise that outside their area of interest globally important social processes are taking place and devote them appropriately more attention. An alternative would be the creation of a good periodical in every world region but that is unlikely to happen soon. A similar necessity arises in current rural sociology, where – despite its universally defined subject – Euro-American sociology of Euro-American rural areas is dominant.

Referring to the question of changes in the living conditions of the rural population in societies where democratic political procedures are followed – if those processes have relatively explicit effects,⁸ that would be a factor deserving consideration in planning and supporting those

⁷ This was one of the issues raised by Andrzej Kaleta, the initiator and editor-in-chief of *Eastern European Countryside*, in an article published in *EEC* in 1999 [Kaleta 1999:16].

⁸ The author of the book describing the oeuvre of Polish sociology concerning the system transformation gave a positive evaluation of this process without providing the criteria of that evaluation [Kolasa-Nowak 2010: 165]. Meanwhile, the suicide rate in Poland, which had for decades been lower in the country than in towns, has been considerably higher in the country than in towns since the beginning of the transformation [Jarosz 1997: 86; GUS 1995:67]. The average lifespan in the countryside has been lower than in towns [Frenkel 2012:43]. In the 90s the number of students in Poland increased 300% (from 0.4 to 1.6 million) but the number of places in student accommodation, mainly used by rural students, only increased 13% [GUS 2001: 239 and 246]. It is difficult to consider that data as a sign of improvement in the position of the rural population in relation to the urban population.

processes.⁹ For at least that reason the existence of the periodical – which has been following changes in the rural areas of Central and Eastern Europe for 20 years – must be considered worthwhile.

References

- Brown, D. L., Bandlerová, A., 2000. 'Research Needs for Rural Development in Central and Eastern Europe', *Eastern European Countryside*. Vol. 6, pp. 149–157.
- Brown, D. L., Bandlerová, A., 2000. *Conclusion and Recommendations*. Brown, D. L., Bandlerová, A. (eds), *Proceedings of Research Conference*, Nitra, pp. 199–200.
- Frenkel, I., 2012. *Ludność wiejska (Rural population)*. In: Wilkin, J. and Nurzyńska, I. (eds.), *Polska wieś 2012. Raport o stanie wsi (The Polish Countryside. A Report on the State of the Countryside)*, Warsaw: Scholar, pp. 15–64.
- Giordano, C. 2012. *Przekłamana transformacja (A false transformation)*. In: Kaleta, A. (ed.) *Cztery dekady socjologii na Uniwersytecie Mikołaja Kopernika (Four decades of sociology at Nicolaus Copernicus University)*, Toruń: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UMK, pp. 199–217.
- GUS, *Rocznik Statystyczny 1995 (The statistical Yearbook)*, Warsaw.
- GUS, *Rocznik Statystyczny 2001 (The statistical Yearbook)*, Warsaw.
- Jarosz, M., 1997. *Samobójstwa (Suicides)*, Warsaw: PWN.
- Kaleta, A., 1999. 'Rural Sociology on the Eve of the XXI Century', *Eastern European Countryside*, Vol. 5, pp. 5–17.
- Kolasa-Nowak, A., 2010. *Zmiana systemowa w Polsce w interpretacjach socjologicznych (The change of system in Poland in sociological interpretations)*, Lublin: Wydawnictwo UMCS.
- Wallerstein, I., 2003. *Emerging Issues in the 21st Century World-system*, Westport-London: Praeger
- Weber, B., 2004. Introduction to the 10th Anniversary of Eastern European Countryside, *Eastern European Countryside*. Vol. 10, pp. 5–9.
- World Commission on Environment and Development, Our Common Future*, 1987. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

⁹ The complex nature of the course and results of the system transformation in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe is thoroughly discussed by Christian Giordano, who has been a member of the editorial team of *EEC* for 20 years [Giordano 2012: 199–217].

