

Krystyna Szafraniec

Looking for a Specificity of Rural Youth. The Polish Case

Abstract

In social consciousness a view is embedded that our rural and agrarian areas are our weakness which limits our development potential and social change. Whatever the reasons (mostly historical) for this view, the divide into rural and urban areas, Poland A and Poland B, is frequently referred to and just as frequently exaggerated, supporting thus various stereotypes and prejudices.¹ Do they also concern the young generation?

Rural areas in Poland are subject to dynamic transformation. The image of rural areas and its reception across society is changing positively. The favourable balance between migration and a growing interest among young people in the countryside as a future place of residence can be used as an example. However, this does not mean that the problem of rural areas and regional differences in Poland has been resolved. Neither do the changes happen as rapidly as could have been expected, nor do they happen in parallel in terms of geography and social structure. Not all of them are positive. The large number of small farms (although land concentration was expected in agriculture) is disturbing. The succession to economically weak farmsteads (which shows that in the face of no employment and non-agricultural life prospects an economically non-viable farm seems – from an individual perspective – the best possible solution). This phenomenon gives rise

¹ See: Szafraniec K., 2004. 'Polish peasants in the process of system changes. The socio-historical analysis'. *Polish Sociological Review*. Vol. 4 (147) .

to many questions. Here, we only want to discuss the questions concerning the young generation – whether their aspirations and life goals, educational decisions, places of residence can be conducive to change (inside and outside rural areas) or rather impede them?

Keywords: rural youth; social, demographic and mental characteristics

Rural Areas as a Living Environment for Young People – Demographic and Social Changes

Rural areas have a population of nearly 14 903 056 people, that is 39.2% of the Polish population, which has remained constant since the end of World War II. The number of young people living there is also greater – 21.4% aged 0–17 (17.2% in cities) and 19.6% aged 18–29 (18.5% in cities).² The social structure of rural areas has undergone considerable change (Table 1).

Table 1. Social structure in rural areas (2009)

Total structure of the rural population by social status and employment area		Structure of the employed population and jobs	
farmers	7.9	farmers, horticulturists, fishermen, forest officers	30.9
private entrepreneurs	2.3	parliament members, senior civil servants, managers	3.2
public sector employees	7.1	specialists	7.0
private sector employees	15.5	office workers	4.4
school and university students	21.6	technicians and middle-level personnel	5.9
pensioners	7.2	service providers (personal services and sellers)	9.2
retired people	15.3	blue collar workers and craftsmen	21.7

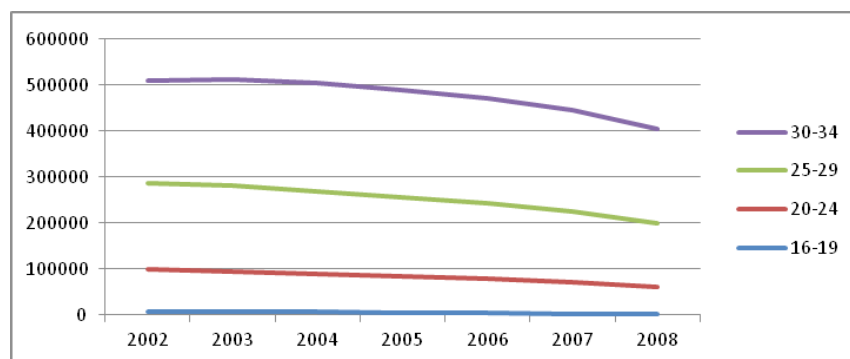
² Based on: *Ludność. Stan i struktura w przekroju terytorialnym. Stan w dniu 30.06.2010 r.* [Population. Territorial status and structure as at 30 June 2010], 2010. Warsaw: Central Statistical Office (GUS).

Table 1. Social structure in rural areas (2009)

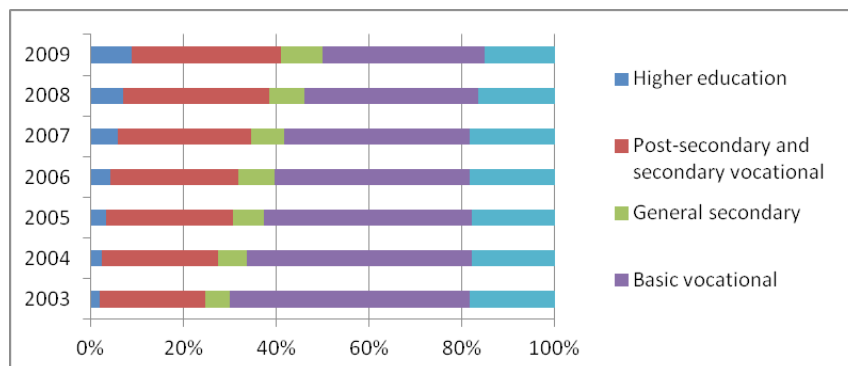
Total structure of the rural population by social status and employment area		Structure of the employed population and jobs	
homeless people	4.6	machine operators and assemblers	9.3
other socially passive	16.5	non-qualified workers	8.1
no data	2.1	army	0.3

Source: Based on the survey 'Diagnoza Społeczna 2009' ['Social Diagnosis 2009'], Halamska, M., 2011. *Społeczna kondycja polskiej wsi* [Social condition in Polish rural areas]. In: Nurzyńska I., Drygas, M. (eds.), *Rozwój obszarów wiejskich w Polsce – diagnozy, strategie i koncepcje polityki* [Development of rural areas in Poland – diagnoses, strategies and policy concepts], Institute of Rural and Agricultural Development of the Polish Academy of Sciences (IRWiR PAN), Warsaw.

On the one hand, rural areas are dominated by a professionally passive population (over 60%) and people with a low social status among the employed (80%), and on the other, groups non-specific to rural areas are more and more visible – specialists, higher officials, office workers, entrepreneurs (20.5%) and people with professional qualifications. Farmers make up less than 8% of the rural population and (together with horticulturists, fishermen and forest officers) 30% of the employed population, and their percentage in the rural social structure is diminishing.

Figure 1. Number of young farmers – changes after 2000 in different age categories

Source: Own study based on the statistics of the Labour Force Survey (BAEL) and Agricultural Social Insurance Fund (KRUS).

Figure 2. Changes in the educational status of young farmers (2009)

Source: Own study based on the statistics of the Labour Force Survey (BAEL) and Agricultural Social Insurance Fund (KRUS).

The young generation is clearly less interested in becoming farmers (fig. 1). This process is consistent, although variably intensive in different regions (fig. 2). Young people take over farmsteads mostly in the eastern and central regions and in the Wielkopolska Region, i.e. where – on the one hand – there is no better alternative to agriculture, and on the other – there is a tradition of good farming.

Table 2. Changes in the educational structure among the rural population

Level of education of the rural population	1998	2002	2008
Lower-secondary/elementary	60.9	44.0	33.6
Basic vocational education	24.2	29.2	33.6
Secondary education	13.1	22.4	25.3
Higher education	1.8	4.3	7.5
Total education	100%	100%	100%

Source: Central Statistical Office (GUS).

Young successors to farmsteads are increasingly better educated and have professional knowledge. The number of people with higher education is on the increase (from 2.1% in 2003 to 8.9% in 2009), while the number of people with a lower educational status is decreasing (basic vocational and lower – from 70% in 2003 to 50% in 2009). This reflects the qualitative changes in agriculture, but also a more general trend – changes in the educational structure of the rural population (Table 2).

The educational profile among parents of young people in education has definitely improved (every 10th rural parent and every 4th urban parent has higher-education qualifications). This brings substantial changes to the socialising context and development conditions of rural children and young people, nevertheless there is still a wide rural-urban gap. Rural parents do not have sufficient competences to help navigate the development of their children and educational decisions. They believe that they do not have a good grasp of the modern world, access to knowledge about new lifestyles, operating of the global markets, new forms of employment, new technological tools (Internet), etc.³

Similar trends (of explicit changes, although still at a distance) can be observed in other areas. The material conditions of rural families are improving. The monthly income per household has increased (from PLN 1887 in 2003 to PLN 2399 in 2007). The greatest dynamics can be observed among farmers and young people. Nevertheless, the average rural income is still 20% lower than the average income in Poland, the average urban income is 12.5% higher.⁴ These differences – as shown above – are even greater in the case of young people, and therefore satisfaction with material status, clearly on the increase in this group since 2006, decreased in 2010 and remains at a striking distance to most of the urban centres.⁵

The greater number of durable goods in rural households (fig. 3), better housing conditions (consistent with higher norms compared with cities

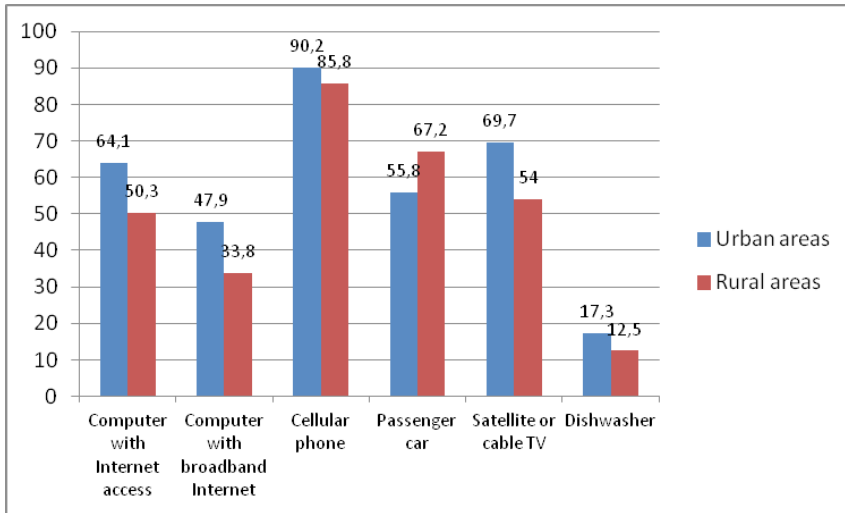
³ Strzemińska, A., Wiśnicka, M., 2011. *Młodzież na wsi. Raport z badania* [Rural young people. Survey report], Pracownia Badań i Innowacji Stocznia, Warsaw, p. 24.

⁴ The greatest dynamics can be observed among families of farmers – see *Sytuacja gospodarstw domowych w 2010 w świetle wyników badania budżetów gospodarstw domowych* [Households in 2010 in view of the household budget survey results]. Warsaw: Central Statistical Office (GUS), 25 May 2011, p. 21 et seq.

⁵ See the analyses in Section 1 of this report.

in terms of metric area)⁶ change the standards of living of rural young people.

Figure 3. Durable goods in households by place of residence



Source: *Sytuacja gospodarstw domowych w 2010 w świetle wyników badania budżetów gospodarstw domowych* [Households in 2010 in view of the household budget survey results], 2010. Warsaw: Central Statistical Office (GUS), 25 May 2011, p. 12.

At the same time there are polarisation processes in rural areas. Families which belong to local elites (white-collar workers with higher education, estate agents, rich farmers) have the best conditions. Families of blue-collar workers and non-salaried people have the least favourable conditions. The former invest in the development and education of their children by sending them to good schools and universities, and thus enable their advancement. The latter are most often weak-willed, their children have short and basic education, following life roles observed in the closest environment.

The differences between regions do not disappear. It is – on the one hand – a division into eastern and western Poland, on the other, into peripheral regions, where traditional agriculture prevails, and those located

⁶ The average metric area of an urban flat is 63.4 m², a rural flat – 93.9 m², in the case of farmers 116 m² – see *Sytuacja gospodarstw domowych ...* [Households...], p. 12.

around large cities. The divisions have been created to a great extent as a result of tradition and history, but also insufficient investment which could have activated non-agricultural labour markets and stopped the drain of young people from specific regions.

The regional divisions are paralleled by differences in status. Where traditional agriculture prevails, there are more low-status families, and there also, to some extent automatically, symptoms of other harmful factors can be observed: a hardly active labour market, a high rate of registered and non-registered unemployment, low income level, poor infrastructure and non-expansive schools in terms of overcoming environmental barriers. Young people originating from such regions have a much greater distance to cover – not only as a result of a poorer environment, but also poorer family socialisation and educational support. The accumulation of these factors gives rise to problem areas which are unable to generate their own developmental opportunities. To overcome them, an external intervention is necessary – not so targeted at a micro level (the programmes *Leader* and *Leader Plus* are known to have been seriously criticised)⁷, but at long-term development strategies for specific regions.⁸

Mental Characteristics: is the Polish Countryside Pessimistic and Helpless?

In addition to objective factors determining the conditions of socialisation and development processes in rural areas subjective factors related to mentality, social awareness and group views are equally important.

⁷ Wasielewski, K., (ed.), 2009. *Tworzenie partnerstw lokalnych i ich sieci na obszarach wiejskich. Doświadczenia z funkcjonowania programu LEADER w Polsce w latach 2004-2009* [Creating local partnerships and their networks in rural areas. Experience from the LEADER programme in Poland (2004–2009)]. Bydgoszcz: University of Economy (WSG).

⁸ See Board of Strategic Advisors to the Prime Minister of Poland (ZDS PRM), 2011, 'Polska 2030. Trzecia fala nowoczesności. Długookresowa Strategia Rozwoju Kraju (wersja robocza)' ['Poland 2030. Third wave of modernity. National long-term development strategy (draft)'], Chancellery of the Prime Minister (KPRM), Warsaw 2011, and *Krajowa Strategia Rozwoju Regionalnego* [National Regional Development Strategy], 2010. Warsaw: Ministry of Regional Development (MRR).

Among them inactivity, lack of self-confidence, pessimism (as a reverse of optimism) – often attributed to rural communities – have particular modeling importance. Depending on how very optimistic or pessimistic we are, we have a more positive or negative attitude to life, ourselves and our future. We feel better or worse, we either do or do not believe in our own potential, cope with difficulties or cannot cope with them.

There is a widespread attitude that optimism/pessimism is a specific type of expectation of the future – its positive or negative notion. Optimism means the belief in a good, bright and safe future whereas pessimism – reversely – that it will be 'black', bad, negative and threatening. The optimist trusts that things will improve whereas the pessimist does not believe in a good tomorrow. Optimism has positive emotions and thoughts about the future whereas pessimism has negative emotions and thoughts about the future. Due to these references to the future optimism and pessimism understood in this way are often described as being anticipative (declarative)⁹. An optimist generally has a positive attitude to life and a potential of life activity whereas the pessimist is passive, helpless and gives in to difficulties. Optimism or pessimism understood in this way does not always fit in with the behaviour of many people and social groups who in spite of having bad expectations for the future, manage to act positively to change their own lives. It is similar with the 'paradoxical' behaviour of optimists – people who are so convinced that everything will be fine that they do nothing (because you have to believe that the 'good' will somehow just come).

For that reason the approach applied in social psychology is more reliable – it emphasises that being optimists or pessimists often lies beyond our awareness. Optimism and pessimism is a specific (automatic) way of expressing our daily successes or failures. We are equipped for this through practical experience. Early socialisation and the way people from our closest environment approach life, how they view the causes of their successes and failures, how long they expect to experience them and how they see their influence on other aspects of their lives have a key significance¹⁰

⁹ Siciński, A. (ed.), 1978. *Styl życia – przemiany we współczesnej Polsce (Life style – changes in Modern Poland)*, Warsaw: PWN.

¹⁰ Seligman, M., 1993. *Optymizmu można się nauczyć (Optimism can be learnt)* Poznań: Wydawnictwo Media Rodzina of Poznań.

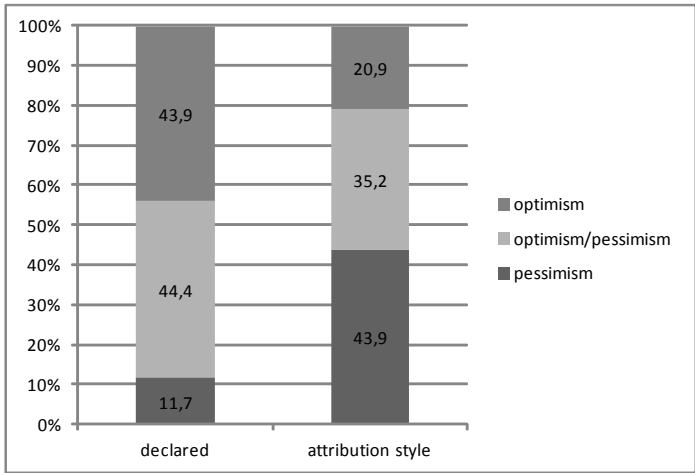
[Seligman 1993]. Pessimists believe that bad experiences in their lives will last long, will influence all their activities and are the result of their own fault. Optimists treat them totally differently. They consider failure as being something shortlived and do not blame themselves. They see it as bad luck, unfavourable circumstances or caused by others. Such people are not put off by failure. They consider difficult situations as a challenge and try harder. The essential virtue of optimism is that it gives rise to perseverance in pursuing one's goal (despite lack of talent or motivation) whereas its drawback is that it deforms the view of reality and may lead to blaming others as being responsible for one's failures. The advantage of pessimism is greater realism in perceiving reality, there are far more disadvantages – pessimism leads to depression, gives rise to inertia rather than activity, is the source of negative emotions: worries, distress and depression. It has a negative influence on one's health and professional career.¹¹ These two different ways of thinking about the reasons for success and failure in life have significant consequences. Much research shows that pessimists give up more easily and are more often defeated. The opposite happens to optimists.

Such optimism/pessimism can be analysed psychometrically and the result which is expressed in figures can be graded on a scale from optimism to pessimism. Such a prospect, applied beside the traditional, anticipative one in the research of rural areas gave an interesting result.¹² Firstly, the research results show various levels of optimism and pessimism depending on the applied method of measurement – declarative or connected with the style of attribution (fig. 4).

¹¹ External attributes are a feature of the optimistic clarification of one's failures.

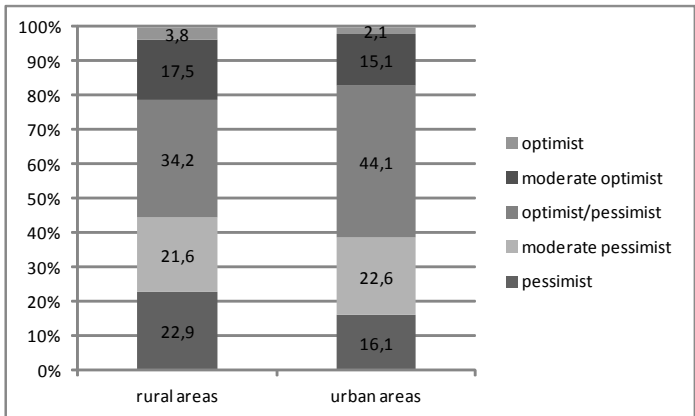
¹² Research was carried out in six rural communes (and two urban ones) in 2004. Apart from the questions addressed directly to the respondents about their optimistic or pessimistic attitude to the future a scale was applied which was culturally adapted to Polish reality and countryside as a way of constructing tools and a method of analysing data together with detailed results, their description and interpretation. It was presented in a book by Szafranec, K., *Kapitał ludzki i zasoby społeczne wsi*, (*Human capital and rural social resources*) op.cit.

Figure 4. Declarative optimism/ pessimism and as a style of attribution (N=1100)



Source: Research ‘Społeczny, edukacyjny i psychologiczny potencjał polskiej wsi,’ (‘The social, educational and psychological potential of the Polish Countryside’), 2004.

Figure 5. Optimistic vs. Pessimistic style of attribution: Differences countryside – town (N=1100)



Source: Research ‘Społeczny, edukacyjny i psychologiczny potencjał polskiej wsi,’ (‘The social, educational and psychological potential of the Polish Countryside’), 2004.

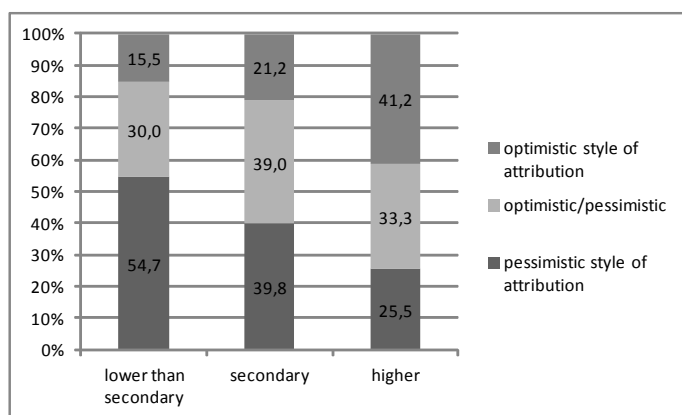
Declarative research gives a far more advantageous view – while there are 11.7% declarative pessimists in the countryside, a pessimistic style of attribution is presented by 44%. It is the reverse for optimism – whereas there are 44% declarative optimists, 21% present an optimistic style of attribution. Nevertheless pessimism is not a specifically rural feature – among the inhabitants of the researched urban communes features of a pessimistic style of attribution were presented by almost 40% of the researched people, i.e. 4 points less than in the countryside (fig. 5).

It is puzzling that there are not many mental differences between the younger and older rural inhabitants. Although optimism/pessimism is not a simple function of age, the expectation that young people will be more optimistic seems justified. In reality (in the research) they are more pessimistic (48% vs. 45%). Why? The origin of optimism/pessimism is the result of earlier life experiences, particularly daily learning and observing the style of attribution applied by people in the immediate milieu and has a strong influence on the shaping of one's own way of thinking. Analysis shows a strong statistical connection in the style of attribution represented by young people with status factors. Those representing a higher status (they have already managed to create better living conditions or have invested in that direction, e.g. have started studying) more frequently reveal an optimistic style. In the countryside entrepreneurs who are more educated and the local rural intelligentsia (among them people becoming leaders in the local community) are generally more optimistic. Pessimists – are far more frequently people who are professionally passive, workers, the owners of not very successful farms and secondary school youth (generally pupils in vocational schools or others with poor school results, from average or low social status families). Young people choosing other career paths (good secondary schools in large towns and then university studies) are open to another type of stimulation, another way of thinking about the world and another evaluation of their own potential. They learn other (optimistic) patterns of attribution and by crossing further cultural barriers overcome patterns of thinking acquired in the family milieu (fig. 6).

This process, no matter how it functions in both categories of youth – both those who choose a short vocational education path and those who choose a long path (leading to university) those following a longer education path – has a greater effectiveness. Nowhere is it automatic, the transgressive effect of education undergoes silencing under the influence of

difficult living conditions and poor future prospects. A drop in optimism is noticed both among young people returning to the countryside after short vocational education and undertaking roles adequate to their status (not too promising) as well as among those following university studies who observe the job market and threatened possibilities of achieving their life goals with anxiety. Education does not therefore act automatically, superficially or permanently.¹³

Figure 6. Optimistic vs pessimistic style of attribution among young rural inhabitants (17–35 year-olds) including educational differences (N=435)



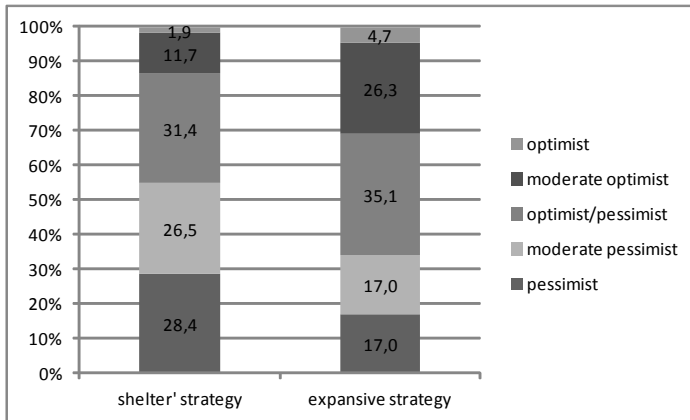
Source: ‘Społeczny, edukacyjny i psychologiczny potencjał polskiej wsi’, (‘The social, educational and psychological potential of the Polish countryside’), 2004.

While an optimistic style of attribution generally encourages people to formulate high life aspirations, the pessimistic one usually acts helplessly – it either lowers the life aspirations in relation to the potential or generates dreaminess which has nothing to do with undertaken actions. This influence can also be seen in the way of functioning in life. Optimists more often apply expansive strategies (they aim to multiply what they have already

¹³ Kwiecińska-Zdrenka, M., (2004). *Aktywni czy bezradni wobec własnej przyszłości?*, (Active or helpless towards their own future). Toruń: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UMK, see too: Ciżkowicz, B., 2009., *Wycuczona bezradność młodzieży* (Learned helplessness of youth). Bydgoszcz: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UKW.

achieved to give their lives a new quality). Pessimists more often apply the 'shelter' strategy (upholding and defending the status quo).

Figure 7. The life strategy according to optimistic or pessimistic style of attribution (young rural inhabitants, N=435)



Source: 'Społeczny, edukacyjny i psychologiczny potencjał polskiej wsi' ('The social, educational and psychological potential of the Polish countryside'), 2004.

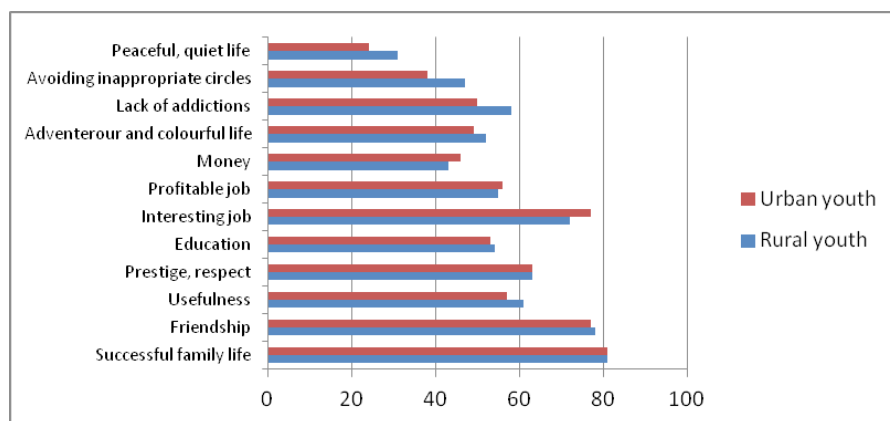
It is interesting that this principle is stronger in the countryside than in towns – in town a higher percentage of people with a pessimistic style of attribution make more daring life decisions. In the countryside pessimism leads to greater helplessness. This should not be linked with mental differences but is rather a question of life differences and prospects.

Rural Young People – What and Who do They Want to Be?

In the processes of system-wide transformation, and in particular in the era of great civilisation challenges, the question whether or not rural young people are sufficiently open-minded and whether or not they manage, will not stand out against urban young people, is an important issue. Undoubtedly, they cannot be considered life minimalists. Although more modest than urban young people, they intend to pursue various careers and

lifestyles. 40% of rural (and nearly 60% of urban) young people aspire to high social status. Young people are not at all interested in the prospect of being farmers – 0.1% of young people¹⁴ declared their readiness to work as farmers in 1998, while 0.2% (a few persons against a population of several thousand) ten years later. 30% of rural (and 50% of urban) young people aspire to a high income (starting salary of PLN 3500). Rural young people slightly more frequently come to terms with rank and file job positions. Twice as often they accept the principle of living modestly (36% compared to 18% in cities). Nevertheless their idea about a successful life little deviates from the ideas held by (demanding) urban young people – they focus on affiliation values, interesting jobs, good social status, and a colourful life of luxury¹⁵ (fig. 8).

Figure 8. Important matters for 19-year-old rural and urban young people



Source: Own study 'Porzucona generacja' – ścieżki edukacyjne i wchodzenie w dorosłość [‘Abandoned generation’ – educational paths and reaching adulthood’], 2007.

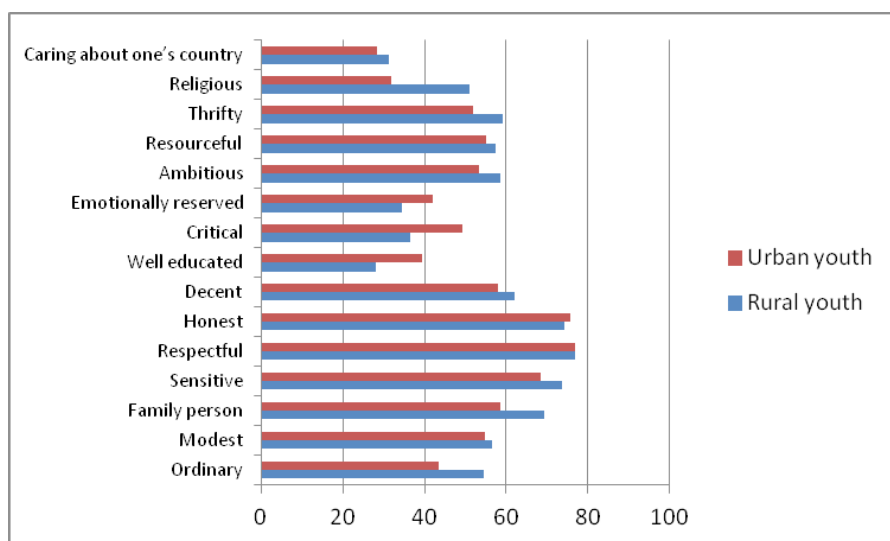
Self-descriptions of rural and urban teenagers are similar, but rural youths more explicitly cultivate tradition-specific traits (attachment to

¹⁴ Complete population survey comprising 15-year-olds starting secondary school in the Toruń Province (N=4651).

¹⁵ Szafranec, K., 2011., *Youth 2011. Poland*. Warszawa: Chancellery of the Prime Minister (KPRM).

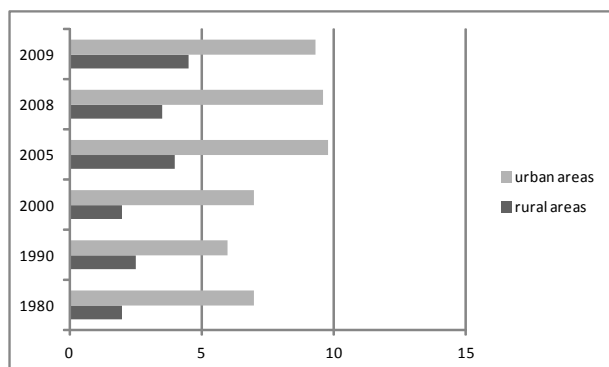
family, religion, modesty, thriftiness, resourcefulness, artfulness), they are more conventional, ordinary, oriented towards the acceptance of their environment (fig. 9). These traits are less prominent, as compared to the past (especially morals and opinions have changed), nevertheless, in terms of tradition – (post)modernity axis, rural young people are closer to the first axis pole, which can be observed not as much in numbers as in mentality.

Figure 9. Self-descriptions of 19-year-old rural and urban young people

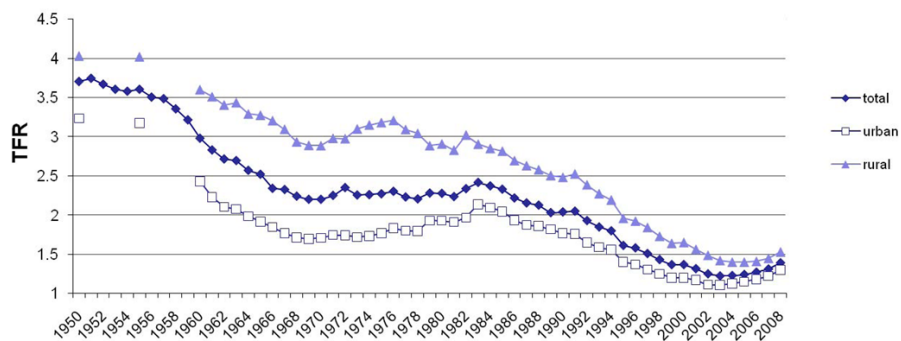


Source: Own study 'Porzucona generacja' – ścieżki edukacyjne i wchodzenie w dorosłość [‘Abandoned generation’ – educational paths and reaching adulthood’], 2007.

They are more traditional as regards marriage and the family. They are not only more in favour of marriage as the most suitable way of being together but also less frequently get divorced. Nevertheless the divorce rate in the countryside has been on the rise for many years and is relatively more frequent among young people (fig. 10).

Figure 10. Divorces among 1000 existing marriages in towns and in the countryside

Source: own study on the basis of: *Rocznik Demograficzny 2010*, (Demographic Annual 2010), 2010. Warsaw: GUS, p. 179.

Figure 11. The fertility rate of women in Poland in the years 1950–2008

Source: Józwiak, J., Kotowska, I. and E. Matysiak, 2010. *Czy liczba dzieci w Polsce musi spadać?* (Does the number of children in Poland have to fall?). Warszawa: GUS.

We come across similar ambivalences when defining the family. In the countryside the family continues to be defined in a very traditional way – not only by pointing to a couple of adults who have children but also by adding that a church marriage is a constitutive condition.¹⁶ At the same

¹⁶ Dyczewski, L., 2009. *Wyobrażenia młodzieży o małżeństwie i rodzinie*, (Young people's ideas about marriage and the family) Lublin: KUL.

time cases of cohabitation and extramarital births in the rural milieu are becoming more clearly naturalised.¹⁷ While childlessness is not socially acceptable in the countryside (by young people too)¹⁸ the procreation patterns are clearly undergoing change. As a result the fertility rate – as in the whole of Poland – is also falling (fig. 11).

The most surprising changes are taking place in relation to religion and in the area of Catholic morality. While the declared faith of rural inhabitants and the level of religious practice have hardly changed over the past twenty years, among young people changes in this regard are quite significant. Since 1992 the percentage of people aged from 18 to 24 who practise regularly has fallen 21 points (from 86% to 65%) and the number of those going to church occasionally has risen almost threefold (from 11% to 31%). However, when compared with all the people researched between the ages of 18 and 24, the rural youth still show a relatively high attachment to religious practice.¹⁹ Although rural youth are still mostly in favour of catholic morality, the specificity is a question of minor differences. In 1989–2005 the average rate of answers approving five catholic norms of marital and family morality (answers ‘unacceptable’/‘forbidden’) dropped from 38.0% to 28.7% among the youth.²⁰ “Deviations from traditional sexual morality are so significant” Janusz Mariański comments the results of research, „that it can be described as a moral revolution. The moral awareness of young catholics in relation to marriage and the family is undergoing processes of pluralism and relativism. Rigorism as regards sexuality is clearly dropping. Many young Poles are feeling more as the creators than the addressees of moral norms. In daily life many compromises are reached as regards marital and family morality and hence the picture of moral stances is neither explicit nor harmonious. In a moral evaluation of

¹⁷ Slany, K., 2002. *Alternatywne formy życia małżeńsko-rodzinnego w ponowoczesnym świecie*, (*Alternative ways of marital – family life in the post-modern world*). Kraków: Zakład Wydawniczy „NOMOS”, pp. 174–194.

¹⁸ *Postawy prokreacyjne Polaków (The Poles’ attitude to procreation)*, 2010. Warszawa: CBOS.

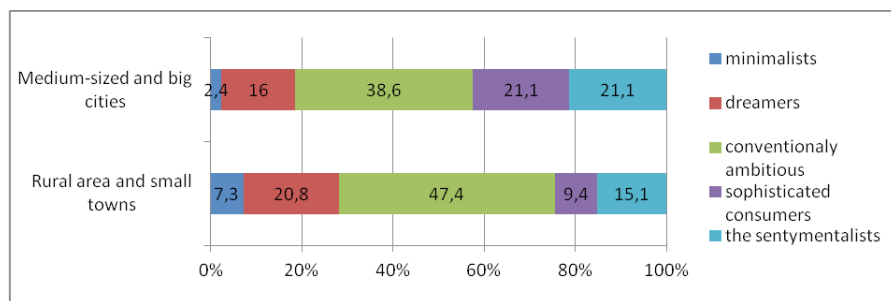
¹⁹ *Dwie dekady przemian religijności w Polsce (Two decades of change in religiousness in Poland)*, 2010. Warszawa: CBOS, pp. 17–23.

²⁰ Zaręba, S. H., 2008. *W kierunku jakiej religijności? Studia nad katolicyzmem polskiej młodzieży*, (*Towards what kind of religiousness? Studies on the catholicism of Polish youth*). Warsaw: Zakład Wydawnictw Statystycznych, pp. 287–321.

abortion, contraception and other issues of sexual morality there is a move towards individual conscience. Recommendations of the institutional church play a secondary role, priority in formulating norms remains with the individual²¹. The main reason for these changes are the processes of modernisation coming with post-modernism and most Polish youth also succumb to it.²²

The differences in life patterns and lifestyle among older generations diminish among the youngest ones (fig. 12), who are to a similar degree in favour of a more or less conventional (or more or less sophisticated) consumerist lifestyle.

Figure 12. Life orientations of thirty-year-olds: rural areas versus urban areas



Source: Own study ‘„The abandoned generation” – educational trajectories and entering adolescence’, 2007.

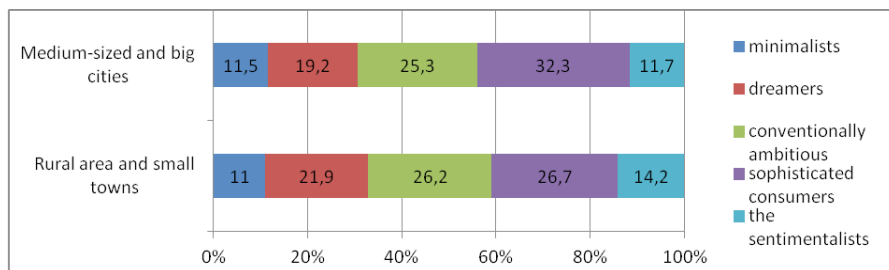
It may prove that being more expansive, the influence of consumerism upon younger generations of youth is more effective. One in three (in cities and rural areas) aspires to at least a satisfying social position and decent living standard connected with a conventional idea of success – financial security, own properly furnished apartment or house, a family, opportunities of enjoyable leisure time. However, more of them go further in their aspirations and perceive a successful life with less conventional

²¹ Mariański, J., 2008. *Emigracja z Kościoła. Religijność młodzieży polskiej w warunkach zmian społecznych*, (*Emigration from the Church. The Religiosity of Polish youth in times of social change*). Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL, pp. 357–360.

²² Mariański, J., 2010. *Religia w społeczeństwie ponowoczesnym. Studium socjologiczne*, (*Religion in post-modern society. A sociological study*). Warsaw: Oficyna Wydawnicza.

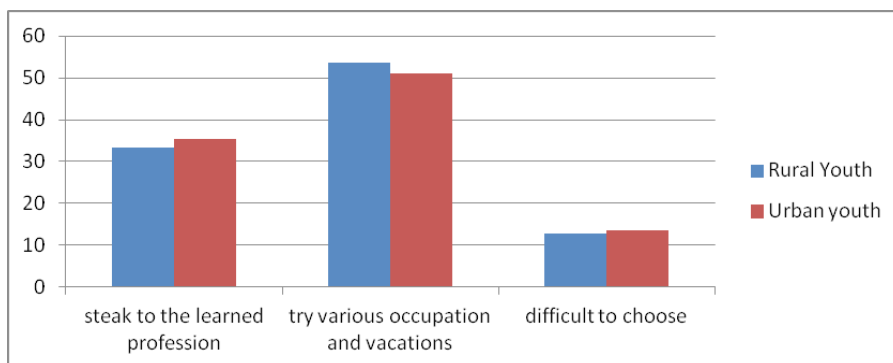
achievements which may include an interesting and dynamic professional career, a high income and lifestyle shaped by sophisticated consumption. Paradoxically, these expectations are rarely combined with the need for wider participation in social life and cultural activity, with celebration of family life and sociability (so-called “sentimentalists”).

Figure 13. Life orientations of nineteen-year-olds: rural areas versus urban areas



Source: Own study ‘„The abandoned generation” – educational trajectories and entering adolescence’, 2007.

Figure 14. Which is better?

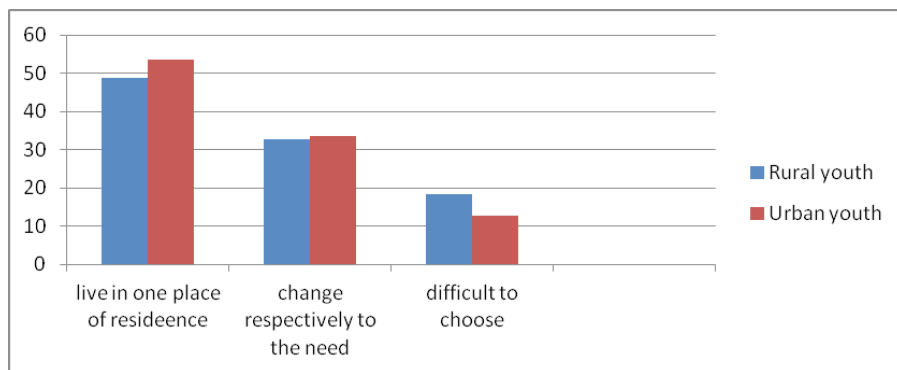


Source: Own study, 2009 (nineteen-year-olds N=846).

Furthermore, there are no significant observable differences in their readiness to accept the challenges dictated by the new requirements of the labour market and globalisation, the most fundamental of which are mobility and flexibility. The mobility of rural nineteen-year-olds, i.e. their declared readiness to take various forms of gainful employment,

changing jobs, employers or places of residence is comparable to the declared mobility of urban youth (the highest in the case of changing jobs – 52%, and the lowest in changing the place of residence – 30%) and higher than among thirty-year-olds.

Figure 15. Which is better?



Source: Own study, 2009 (nineteen-year-olds N=846).

Once again, the data may suggest better adaptation skills of the younger generations of rural youth and convergence of their profile with that of their urban peers. The above does not exclude some differences between them. Such an assumption would be easy to refute. Differences do exist but they result not only from the fact that one lives either in an urban or rural area, but rather from the fact that one grows up in micro worlds shaped by a specific family background (parents' social position, their financial status and the ways they think about the future of their children). Today the above are the main determinants of rural youth's life opportunities. The area we live in takes second place, although it is crucial for quality of the educational offer available in rural and urban areas and poorer educational opportunities of rural youth – still being decreased by a high low-status factor.

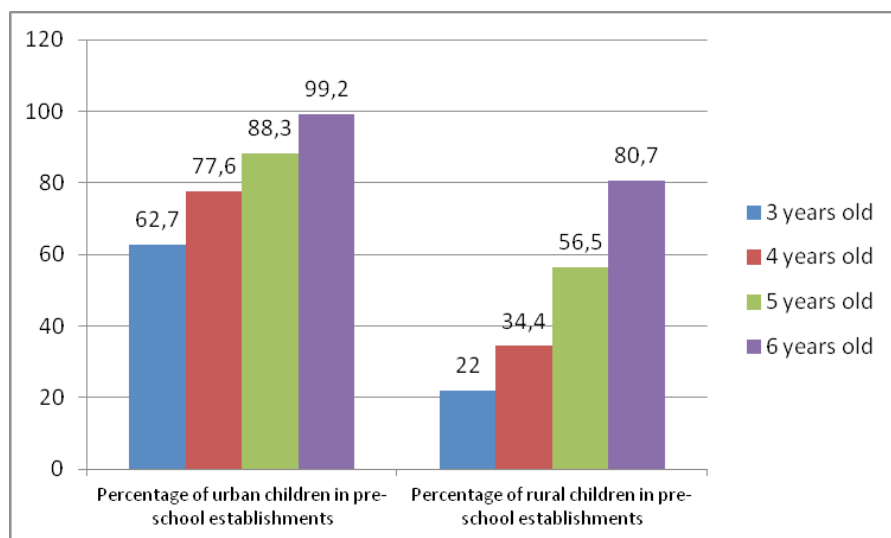
Educational Opportunities for Rural Young People

Pre-school education, which is the most important stage in creating equal educational opportunities as it covers an early development phase, is

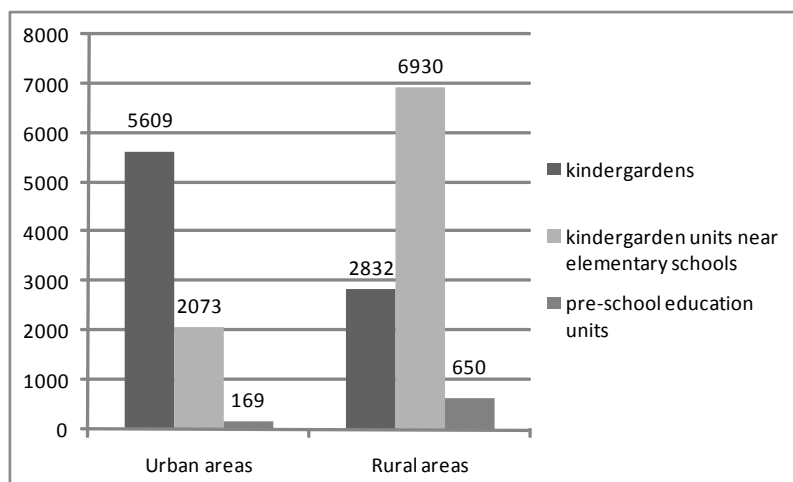
not common in rural areas. While in cities most 3–4 year olds attend pre-school establishments, in rural areas most of them stay at home (Fig. 16). Rural children are raised in a familiar environment, far away from strangers, however they do not have stimulation providing them with new social relations, new types of experience or a different type of sensitivity. Furthermore, children attending pre-school institutions, contrary to urban children, mostly attend kindergarten units near schools, not kindergartens (fig. 17).

The regional differences are substantial – the greatest percentage of children attending kindergartens can be found in the western provinces (Opolskie, Śląskie and Wielkopolskie), the smallest – in central and eastern Poland as these regions are to a greater extent agricultural areas, and as a consequence have a lower level of professional activity among women. As a result, there are no institutional services of child care (“because women do not work either way”), and in this context they are secondarily related to the traditional roles, which reinforces differences between regions.

Figure 16. Percentage of urban and rural children attending pre-school establishments



Source: *Oświata i wychowanie w roku szkolnym 2009/10* [Schooling and education in the school year 2009/2010], 2010. Warsaw: Central Statistical Office (GUS), p. 54.

Figure 17. Urban and rural pre-school education establishments

Source: *Oświata i wychowanie w roku szkolnym 2009/10 [Schooling and education in the school year 2009/2010]*, 2010. Warsaw: Central Statistical Office (GUS), p. 54.

The later commencement of relations with the extra-familial environment and education is the second – apart from poorer primary socialisation – factor which contributes to the distance between rural and urban young people. This is further fostered by the working conditions of rural schools, poorer in terms of infrastructure (four times as few laboratories, twice as few gym halls and more limited educational services in foreign languages as compared to urban schools), culture (due to the cultural capital brought to school and the quality of social support, rural schools start at a disadvantage and have a greater distance to cover). Other factors which contribute to this distance is the institutional poverty of rural areas underlying the lack of cultural stimulation and meeting places where young people can spend their free time together, discover and develop their interests.²³ In practical terms, this means the constant presence of family- and environment-generated

²³ Strzezińska, A., Wiśnicka, M., op. cit., p. 24–25, 52 et seq.

stigmas in the consciousness and self-assessment of young people, and as a consequence, in their educational decisions based on smaller risk.²⁴

Table 3. Percentage of rural and urban youth in different types of upper-secondary schools

School type	Dwelling place					
	2003			2009		
	countryside	small town	big city	countryside	small town	big city
vocational	15.3	3.2	9.5	13.0	3.7	8.8
technical secondary	35.2	31.2	26.9	38.9	33.0	30.3
general secondary	49.5	65.6	63.6	48.1	63.3	60.8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Domalewski, J., 2010. 'Społeczne, środowiskowe i edukacyjne uwarunkowania dróg szkolnych młodzieży – dynamika zmian' ('Social, environmental and educational conditions of young people's school paths – the dynamic of change'). Warsaw: IRWiR PAN, seminar 5 February 2010.

Rural young people, as a majority of Polish young people aspiring to higher education, choose mainly general secondary schools (56% of lower-secondary students), usually, however, these are schools with a lower standard of teaching and requirements. More and more often they choose technical upper-secondary schools. Over a period of 6 years, interest in these schools has increased by 10 pp (from 24.4% in 2003 to 34.1% in 2009).²⁵ For over a decade rural young people have been observed to show

²⁴ Domalewski, J., 2006. 'Szkoła wiejska – katalizator czy inhibitor zmian systemowych?' ['Rural school – a catalytic agent or inhibitor of system-wide changes?'], doctoral thesis, Toruń: Institute of Sociology at Nicolaus Copernicus University (IS UMK).

²⁵ Domalewski, J., 2011. *Wymiary i uwarunkowania zróżnicowania szkolnictwa ponadgimnazjalnego* [The context and conditions underlying the differences in upper-secondary schools]. In: Domalewski, J., Wasielewski, K. (eds.), 2011. *Zmiany w edukacji – szkoła i jej społeczne otoczenie* [Changes in education – school and its social environment], Toruń: Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek.

a strong interest in higher education (up to nearly 70% of secondary school graduates at its peak). In the traditional academic establishments rural young people make up on average 21% of the total number of students, in the new ones up to 35%. Rural young people usually choose those universities and courses which offer more lenient enrolment procedures – lower competition at the start, the greater percentage of rural young people. Another important factor underlying their preferences and educational decisions is the certainty of employment guaranteed by specific university studies – rural secondary school graduates more often enrol in traditional courses which enable acquiring a “specific” profession (e.g. teacher’s), imaginable to them. They also apply to those universities which have fewer applicants. They employ characteristic progressive strategies – gradually raise their standards and reach successive goals, which is greatly supported and promoted by experienced successes and new challenges. Due to their exceptional motivation to learn combined with intellectual advantages, rural young people are frequently better students than their urban peers.²⁶

The Future of Rural Areas from the Perspective of Young People’s Life Decisions

What future awaits the countryside? Will it be teeming with life or become depopulated? At the end of the last decade it was still considered a worse place to live in. Today, these views have significantly changed which is as much a result of positive changes in rural areas as of the increased risk of living elsewhere. The view that rural areas offer no prospects for young people is to a greater extent characteristic for the rural elderly (60%) than young people (45%) which is a considerable change in comparison with the past. 50% of rural and 13% of urban young people declare their willingness to live in the countryside. These are more often young people from families with relatively lower status, more often boys than girls, people with less successful educational careers and who are less demanding towards life, but concerned about ecology, living far from city noise, oriented towards life harmony.

²⁶ Wasielewski, K., 2012. *Drogi młodzieży wiejskiej na uniwersytet [Educational paths of rural young people to university]*. Toruń: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UMK.

However, who returns to live in rural areas having completed their education and why? On the one hand, these are people with lower-status education and less useful professional qualifications who cannot afford an independent life in the city. In rural areas they most often fuel the ranks of the unemployed,²⁷ emigrants²⁸, members (or successors) of their father's farmstead. On the other hand, these are graduates of secondary schools and universities (also from cities) who find employment in self-government administration, NGO networks or local cultural and educational institutions.

Who does not return to live in rural areas? Most university graduates (2/3) do not come back. They are attracted to urban agglomerations and regions with greater development dynamics. "Brain drain" processes start as soon as the selection of university – the best secondary school graduates – leave their own regions and go to centres with greater dynamics and development (e.g. from Warmia-Masuria to Warsaw, Poznań or Gdańsk). There are more women among them. The reasons include the labour market, or rather the lack thereof in rural areas, also the aspiration of contemporary women for independence and life partners with a higher or at least comparable status and promising life prospects.

If in the second half of the 1990s we still wondered whether rural young people were able to face the challenges of the transformation period – whether they would manage to integrate into the newly emerging series of changes and be able, with their (educational, life) decisions and choices, to overcome the social structure reproduction processes in rural areas, then these concerns have now disappeared. These young people are different than their peers from the past and represent the greatest mental similarities to urban young people. It is not that the specific features of rural young people are fading away. They are still more traditional, more conventional in their choices and less pampered by life. They more often accept such a situation. At the same time their problem is that their awakened life aspirations can be expressed neither in rural areas nor elsewhere – the possibilities offered in rural areas are not sufficiently diversified and extensive, while large urban

²⁷ In 2007 there were 59.1% unemployed people aged 34, in 2009 63.7%; in cities 51.3% and 52% respectively.

²⁸ Young residents in rural areas are the largest group of emigrants: 43.6% permanent emigrants and 85.6% temporary emigrants.

centres are too competitive and expensive for a start into an independent life. The decision to live in the countryside is still considered an emergency option, it guarantees safer survival for those who are not sufficiently ready to compete for a social position in a city.

The agricultural sector – although not entirely unattractive for young people – shows astonishing survival ability. The reasons for that include – on the one hand – positive changes in agriculture and management, while on the other, the absorptive power of non-agricultural labour markets which narrow down the possibilities of rural young people. The processes of generational exchange accelerate the internal polarisation of rural areas which will contribute both to a greater emergence of modern agriculture and rural entrepreneurship, and expansion (especially in some regions – where the modernisation processes are poorly advanced) of poverty margins serviced by social transfers. The reduced opportunities of economic migration to EU countries, affected in some respects with a much more serious downturn in the economy than Poland, can intensify social problems in rural areas. The inertness in reviving labour markets in agricultural regions will deepen the existing differences between the centre and the peripheral areas. Therefore, it is so important to develop management strategies for large investments which will prevent the establishment and extension of differences between regions – equally important as the investments in the development of digital network and infrastructure in rural areas which could not only change the occupational prospects of the young generation, but also reduce the mental, social and civic exclusion thanks to the availability of such areas where most urban young people live.

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