

POLISH AGRICULTURE. A CASE STUDY: EXTENSION SERVICES – RETROSPECTIVE PERSPECTIVE AND CURRENT ISSUES

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Abstract

An attempt of this article is to review experiences of the Polish agricultural extension services in a broad historical context. In the introductory part, turbulent history of the one century (1918-2018) is outlined. Then, experiences of agricultural extension are briefed, coming back to the 19-th century, a period of the partition and including achievements of agricultural extension in a brief interwar period. In the following section of the article, dilemmas of agricultural extension services during a Centrally Planned Economy regime are presented. It is pointed-out that they were a victim of dominating ideological concerns over the economy with resultant half-hearted approach towards dominating peasant sector. Then, experiences of the Polish system transformation and European integration processes are overviewed. In particular, a new initiative (emerged in 2015) – “Network for Innovation in Agriculture and Rural Areas” is briefed. In the concluding part, Polish experiences, both successes and shortcomings, are summarized.

Key words: agricultural extension, contemporary Poland’s history

INTRODUCTION

During a century (1918-2018) Poland witnesses a stormy history. Together with the end of the 1-st World War terminated 123-year long period of partitions (the Polish territory was ruled by Tsar Russia, the Austro-Hungarian empire and Prussia). Rebirth of the state meant the necessity to shape and protect borders (the Greater Poland and Silesian uprisings, Bolshevik-Polish war) and the introduction of uniform administrative and legal structures throughout the territory. There were three separate currencies, systems of education, customs or taxes. Therefore, the currency (introduction of the Polish mark, replaced by złoty since 1924), solutions in education or in the financial system were gradually unified. During a short interwar period, the first attempts to organize nationwide agricultural extension were undertaken.

The outbreak of the 2-nd World War ended this almost 20-year period of peaceful development and, once again, led to fundamental changes in both state and social structures. The state borders were almost

totally changed (before the war there was above 300-kilometer section of the common border with Romania). The territory of the country decreased by approx. 48% – from 380 to 312.7 thousand square km. with over 1/3 of the present Polish area being post-German lands. Consequently, ethnic and religious relations were substantially impacted. Before the war, about one third of the total population were national minorities with different religious denominations – in today Poland, their share fell tenfold. Nowadays Poland is one of the most uniform European countries and approx. 90% of the population declares belonging to Catholic traditions.

Particularly significant consequences for the development of Poland had the enforcement of a system of Centrally Planned Economy lasting until September 1989, until the democratic breakthrough of the Tadeusz Mazowiecki cabinet.

During the socialist regime, Poland enjoyed the largest relative “margin of freedom” within so-called the socialist camp. It is due to a number of interrelated issues: relatively strong position of the Catholic church;

population resistance to solutions coming from the "East" (still vivid memory of the war with the Bolsheviks and deportations to Siberia during the Soviet occupation of 1939-1941) and peculiarities of the Gomulka and Gierk regimes – the first and one of the last Communist rulers of the country. Gomulka tried to use a small margin of freedom, being – among others – against the rapid and forced collectivization of agriculture, while Gierk was looking for "socialism with a human face" and his policy of "opening to the West" made him popular in the society.

A significant distinction of Poland from all other countries controlled by the Kremlin was not only the survival but also the dominance of the peasant sector in agriculture. However, after the unsuccessful attempts of forced collectivization, the state's agricultural policy (after 1956) was characterized by a certain schizophrenia. In milder forms, policy of collectivization was continued (difficulties in access to means of production and agricultural machinery, tax burden, lack of agricultural pensions or access to medical services on general principles) with parallel pragmatic support for peasant farming through, among others, agricultural advisory system. Hence, in 1989, the year of the fall of socialism, Polish peasants owned more than 80% of the total agricultural land. Half-hearted attempts of reforms in the 1970s (for example, Poland was at that time the only one socialist country where a citizen could have a bank account in convertible currencies) failed and did not save socialism in Poland from its fall [9].

Dramatic market failures led, in the second half of the 1970s, into the introduction of the food rationing system, gradually extended to the entire range of different products. The fact that a democratic breakthrough took place in 1989 could be attributed to several factors. Since 1985, the Brezhnev doctrine of keeping the satellite states in line, began to give room to the policy of "glasnost" and "perestroika" introduced by Mikhail Gorbachev. The peaceful "Solidarity" revolution, initiated in August 1980, despite being crushed by the authorities through the introduction of martial law (13-th December 1981), contributed to the

development of the democratic opposition. The two stages of economic reforms declared by the authorities failed but, from the mid-1980s, cracks began to appear in the old structures of the socialist system – since 1985 some solutions appropriate rather to the liberal market economy were introduced. The Constitutional Court began its judicial activity in 1986. In 1987, the Rural Foundation Supporting the Supply of Water, independent from the Communist government and initiated by the Church, was established. At the same time, the Office of the Ombudsman for citizens' rights was also established. The Act on Freedom of Economic Activity, adopted in December 1988, was the real breakthrough in economic life [7].

However, the Polish economy of the late 1980s was declining (described even as the "bankrupt estate"). Under the pressure of further strikes, caused by the deteriorating socio-economic situation, famous Round Table negotiation took place. They brought an agreement between a part of the opposition and the government – its most important point was the holding of partly free and democratic elections to the Sejm and the Senate (the newly appointed upper chamber of the Parliament). These elections, carried out on 4-th June 1989, resulted in the losing of the power of the Communists and, in September 1989, non-communist government of T. Mazowiecki was constituted, the first one in the Central and Eastern Europe in the post-war period.

At the turn of the 1980s and 1990s, a radical reform package was launched, bringing the end of more than forty years of socialism in Poland. System transformation meant a simultaneous rebuilding of the political system, structures of the state and the introduction of a market economy: privatization, exchangeable currency and the resultant regulation of the economy by the market. The structure of a land ownership in Poland in 1989 was a kind of inverted pyramid as compared to other COMECON countries: state farms occupied only 20% of agricultural land, agricultural cooperatives below 5% and the remaining over 80% were

in the hands of private farmers. One of the difficulties in the transformation of agriculture was the significant diversification of the agrarian structure between the regions. While in the area of Ostrołęka (nowadays a part of the capital Mazowieckie voivodship) over 90% of the land was owned by farmers, in the North and West regions (lands incorporated into Poland after 2-nd World War), socialist sector in agriculture often exceeded 50% – in those areas rapid collapse of state farms took place with resultant unemployment and many painful social problems. Already in the first years of system transformation, the aspirations of the membership in the then European Communities were clearly confirmed by the preamble of the Association Treaty, signed 16-th December 1991. The Office of the Government Plenipotentiary for European Integration and Foreign Assistance was created in 1991, transformed in 1996 into the ministerial Office of the Committee for European Integration.

The beginnings of transformation were difficult for agriculture. Despite the provisions of the "asymmetry of benefits" in the Association Treaty (easier access to European markets), the completely opposite phenomenon took place – the balance of agricultural trade became negative for Poland. This was due to radical reforms, including liberalization of foreign trade. At that time, Polish farmers lived in more market economy environment than the European ones, enjoying the CAP "umbrella". In the period preceding the accession, there was a significant modernization of the food industry and changes in the farms themselves. As a result – contrary to many earlier fears – the integration of the Polish agri-food sector (1-st May 2005 – EU membership) was smooth and without major perturbations [8].

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The purpose of this article is to deliver the overview experiences of the Polish agricultural extension services in a broad historical perspective, covering the period of the two centuries. A research question is put if

we can still learn from the past, following a Latin proverb: "historia magistra vitae est". Consequently, four different political periods are considered: the partitions, brief inter-war period, decades of the socialist regime and last era of the system transformation and the European integration. Therefore, basically it is not an empirical work but the review article, instead off. The monography approach and descriptive method is applied in this article, based on extensive literature studies. Personal experiences of the author as an academic teacher and an expert involved in rural development projects and a number of interviews with professionals engaged in rural development contributed to the concluding opinions and remarks.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Agricultural extension in Poland. Retrospective outlook

Development of contemporary agriculture is due to a dynamic progress of science and methods of production during 19-th century. an age of "steam and electricity". This also applies to Polish lands, for a whole century divided between three neighboring countries. Until 1918 (regaining independence), the development of agricultural sciences, rural associations and the beginnings of advisory consultancy took place in various conditions and therefore exhibited a lot of dissimilarities. One of the important factors in the social development of the village was the enfranchisement of peasants. It was initiated in 1807 in the Prussian partition (the process was completed in 1850). In the Austrian partition, the enfranchisement took place as a one-step act, by virtue of the edict of 1848. At the latest, in 1864, liquidation of feudal relations occurred in the Russian partition (as a political consequence of the January Uprising) [20]. Newly liberated peasants, often of low education level and managing small and indebted farms and were not prepared for independent management – bringing them into the independent "on their own" farmers required time and support.

The first step to progress in agriculture is research related to education. The beginnings of the University level agricultural education in the Polish lands date back to the early nineteenth century. Already in 1803, the Department of Agriculture was founded in Vilnius at the local University – one of the pioneers of Polish agricultural sciences, Michał Oczapowski was a Member of its Staff during a period 1819-1831. At the Jagiellonian University of Cracow (established in 1364, the oldest in Poland), the Department of Agriculture was established in 1806. However, it was abolished three years later by the Austrian authorities. At the University of Lvov, the Department of Agriculture was erected in 1814. In those years alone, in 1816 the Institute of Agriculture in Marymont was founded (it initiated today's the SGGW, the Warsaw University for Agriculture) [3].

The advancement of agricultural sciences was accompanied by the expansion of scientific literature. It is estimated that 98 agricultural journals were issued during a period 1795-1860. Some of them are worth to be mentioned as they are available to the readers until today. In Warsaw, since 1820 “Sylwan” is issued, recognized as one of the world oldest journals on forestry. In 1903, the first volume of “Roczniki Nauk Rolniczych” [Yearbooks of Agricultural Sciences] appeared in Cracow. Dissemination of progress in agriculture was not yet institutionally organized. In the society under annexed Poland, it was one of the elements of "organic work", long-term activities covering not only economic issues, but also broadly understood social and cultural ones. They were aimed for the protection of cultural heritage, because they were accompanied by patriotic expectations – regaining independence of the state, whenever convenient conditions would emerged.

A part of gentry was the mainstay of such traditions. It is worth mentioning one significant example – of the important role played by Dezydery Chłapowski, the landowner from Turwia, the region of Great Poland. After taking over the indebted estate

from his father, he went to England, where – working on the farm – he learned in depth the best agricultural practices of that time. After returning, he successfully implemented them in his land estate. Then, he propagated them practically by educating about 80 farm managers. In this way, he initiated a specific school of modern agriculture [4].

Voluntary agricultural organizations A significant role in the system of support for rural development and agriculture played social organizations, voluntary and emerging in a bottom-up way. Very often they were for the chambers of agriculture a kind of their executive apparatus: “In principle, all direct activities on the dissemination of agricultural progress were carried out by county associations of agricultural circles, by initiating works in agricultural circles, industry associations and circles of rural housewives, or supporting work in ... the circles of rural youth.” [16].

As early as 1810, a Business and Agricultural Association was established in the territory of the Russian partition. Liquidated after only two years, revived operations in 1858, to be liquidated again by the Tsarist authorities. It was not until 1907 that the Central Agricultural Society was established. In Lvov, the Austrian partition, in 1829, the Galician Agricultural Society was established, which – under the name of the Eastern Minor Polish Economic Association – survived until the outbreak of the war in 1939.

A bit later, in 1836, the Agricultural Society began its works in Gniezno, in the area of the Prussian partition.

In 1918, immediately before regaining independence, there were 862 agricultural circles in the Prussian partition, 1882 – in the Austrian partition and 1899 – in Russian. In the last years of the interwar period, the Central Society of Organizations and Agricultural Circles with headquarters in Warsaw operated and four other independent regional associations gathering together voluntary agricultural organizations. It is estimated that they covered around 14% of all farm owners. There were, however,

significant differences between regions: from 48% in Pomerania to 5% in the Vilnius region and only 2.5% in Polesie.

In the rural environment, there were generally high prestige industry associations, such as the Association of Cattle Breeders, or the Association of Planters of Sugar Beet.

Another important form of self-organization of local communities was the cooperative movement, the most developed in the second half of the nineteenth century in the Prussian partition. Banks played a major role in this movement, not only economic one but also important for conservation of national feeling and social activists such as Father Piotr Wawrzyniak played a great role in it [23]. During the interwar period, the cooperative movement developed further, but not in a territorially even manner.

In the years 1938-1939, the largest in number were (3,707) credit and agri-food cooperatives (3,207). Dairy cooperatives (1,475) also played an important role. In addition, 454 agricultural and trade cooperatives were registered.

However, nationwide structures were not developed during that period, as well as the unification of agricultural education. To establish a nationwide representation of agriculture, a resolution of the Central Congress of the Society of Organizations and Agricultural Circles of March 1936 was unanimously adopted – but that postulate remained only on paper.

In addition, socio-economic organizations competed with each other for influence and were politically diverse. The conflict between the interests of landowners and small-farm associations was particularly significant. Rural youth was also associated in several organizations with a different ideological and political profile, such as the Central Union of Rural Youth "Siew" ["Seeds"] and the Union of Rural Youth of the Republic of Poland [16].

Social agronomy and practical implementation of this concept The term "social agronomy" was used in the title of the book by the Russian author Tachianov (1888-1937). In Poland, W. Grabski, an

agricultural economist and politician began to use it in 1928 (he is especially known as the author of the currency reform of 1924, when the Polish mark was replaced by the złoty). According to his definition, the social agronomy is: "a social activity, based on a private initiative, or on associations, or on institutions, or on local government and the state, consisting in dissemination of agronomic knowledge and its application by the broadest classes (from priests to peasants, inclusively)". It is therefore a coherent system of socio-professional agricultural education and upbringing in the spirit of making an active attitude to life. Thus, it concerns both the sphere of agricultural production and social relations: cooperation of various economic institutions (such as rural cooperatives or agricultural circles) and socio-cultural ones (for example, youth associations and rural housewives' circles). Therefore, at the focusing point was the man as a subject. Emphasis was placed on shaping the teamwork habits [16].

This concept was connected with two directions of agricultural education – the development of agricultural extension service and extramural agricultural courses. One of the important elements of these activities was the dissemination of agricultural knowledge and progress – agricultural innovations covering all the rural environment. Therefore, social agronomy, as a tool of spreading innovative methods in agriculture, was a construction based itself on three pillars: agricultural sciences and education, agricultural organizations and associations framework and agricultural producer's network.

University level research and education were conducted in one Agricultural University, the SGGW of Warsaw and four Agricultural Faculties at Universities in Cracow, Lvov, Poznań and Vilnius with total number of graduates of around two thousands. Thus, the concept included previously established institutions, and also used former experience. Its important new structural element were the chambers of agriculture.

Significance of agricultural chambers

Agricultural chambers were the most important institution of agricultural self-government. Their beginnings on Polish territories date back to 1894, when the Prussian authorities issued a bill under which the Agricultural Chamber in Poznań was established – its first meeting took place in February 1896. As a result of the victorious Greater Poland Uprising in January 1919, it passed into Polish hands. Under the ordinance of the Minister of the former Prussian district – from the beginning of March 1919 – the chamber obtained the right to organize lower agricultural schools and other similar institutions, as well as the right to control these schools. In the Constitution of the Republic of Poland, adopted on 17-th March 1921, a provision was made (Article 68) on the establishment of a future separate act of economic self-government, including agricultural chambers and, moreover, craft, commercial and industrial ones, associated in the Supreme Chamber of Commerce. The first all-Polish act regarding the activities of agricultural chambers was the President's Regulation of March 1928, announcing their establishment throughout the country. Nevertheless, attempts to introduce homogeneous structures of agricultural chambers in the whole of Poland had failed. Thus, agricultural chambers covered the area of one province.

The basic tasks of agricultural chambers included:

- representing and defending the interests of agriculture;
- undertaking independent initiatives in the field of comprehensive support of agriculture and
- performing the tasks entrusted to them – especially in the field of establishing and running agricultural schools, agricultural experimentation and consulting.

In the interwar period of Poland, 26 agricultural enterprises were involved in experiments – 16 of them belonged to the agricultural chambers. An interesting form of experimental work by the chambers of agriculture were "experimental circles",

voluntary associations from a few to a dozen farmers, conducting a close experiments in their farms. They received subsidies from the Ministry of Agriculture and agricultural chambers. During a period 1926-1938, 84 such experimental circles were created. In addition, agricultural schools run by agricultural chambers participated in the experimentation in Pomerania and Greater Poland.

An important form of support for progress in the methods of farming by agricultural chambers was the organization of "leading farms". These were teams of 4-5 farmers who, as local leaders, undertook various initiatives in their environment, for example in the field of collective management of meadows and pastures [1].

In 1935, the Association of Chambers and Agricultural Organizations was established, bringing together 13 regional Chambers of Agriculture. A year later, the Rural Culture Institute was established, conceived, among others as an advisory and auxiliary body of government administration [16].

Coordination of all agricultural tasks was the responsibility of the Ministry of Agriculture and Agricultural Reform. The intermediary body between the territorial self-government and the central level of state administration was the economic self-government, including the chambers of agriculture. Voluntary socio-agricultural associations at the local level were involved in the "work from the bottom". *Agricultural extension* In the period discussed here, as many as 2/3 of the total population relied on agriculture. The overpopulation of rural areas was particularly severe in the South-Eastern part of the country. Activation of agricultural production was not conducive to farm fragmentation – 64% of them did not exceed 5 ha. The principles of modern agriculture, developed in the nineteenth century, therefore required translating into a farm-gate level.

The beginnings of today's adviser, or how it was described at that time – an agricultural instructor – goes back to 1860. when the Royal Danish Agricultural Society appointed the first consultant for dairy sector. In the

Polish lands at the earliest, at the end of the 19th century, agricultural instructors appeared in the region of Greater Poland. They were so-called itinerant teachers engaged by the Agricultural Society. In the 1920s, after regaining the independence, three pillars of advisory services can be distinguished:

- a) agricultural instructors dealing with the issues of peasant farms and its modernization;
- b) instructors for rural household and educational work among women;
- c) instructors supporting rural youth.

In 1935, a total of over 1,500 instructors were employed in all 241 counties. They were supported by the staff of agricultural chambers and rural cooperatives as well as teachers of agricultural schools. Thus, approximately three thousand professionals dealt with the instructor's work for rural societies, a great success for the then realities. The basis for the staff distribution were county agricultural instructors varied in the number from five to ten. As early as in 1918 they established Union of Instructors of Rural and Social Work, counting 130 members in 1921 and publishing for some time even their own journal, "Głos Instruktorski" ("Instructor's Voice").

The first school that educated instructors and teachers of agricultural schools was the State School of Rural Economy in Cieszyn. A few years later, in 1927/29, the specialization of social agronomy was created at the Main School for the Rural Economy, the SGGW in Warsaw. For the purpose of education, the Social Agronomy Department at the Faculty of Agriculture was established, the first scientific and didactic unit of that type in Europe. In addition, since 1929, the Central Office for Upgrading Agricultural Instructors at the Museum of Industry and Agriculture was involved in teaching activities and, since 1933, the Central Commission for the Training of Instructors at the Central Society of Organizations and Agricultural Circles [13].

The mission of the agricultural instructor was to inspire the rural environment so that it would be able to act and develop on the basis of its own strength. One of the practical ways

to implement these assumptions was to organize model farms. It usually started with group visits of farms belonging to members of farm circles, during which advice was given on improvements to farming practices – such actions were taken at the earliest in Greater Poland and then covered other parts of the territory. The adopted method of operation was mainly based on the principle: "example – implementation". Thus, the institution of the leading farm was shaped by practice, to a large extent by method of trial and error.

The farms targeted to be the leading ones were selected by county instructors. The instructor appreciated as a partner enlightened and entrepreneurial farmer and, at the same time, enjoying respect in his environment. Around such a farmer, who was the owner of the leading farm, a cluster of several other farms was formed, usually belonging to the best farmers in the village. The range of territorial impact in "breadth" and "in depth" was increased by the creation of the network of the leading farms. Therefore, over a dozen leading villages such as Lisków, Albigowa and Cupryły were emerged throughout the country. Each of them was often the purpose of peasant exploration tours. The aforementioned actions were supported by the Ministry of Agriculture, in which a Committee of the Organization of Small-scale Farms was established in 1934. Among others, it was to elaborate the rules of organization, including the methods of cooperation between leading farms and agricultural chambers. The solutions discussed here belong to the long-term achievements of the agricultural advisory services of the interwar period, which were squandered by the wartime and its subsequent political consequences. That is why they are worth to be remembered today.

Some difficulties faced by the instructors also have to be mentioned as they sound also quite contemporary. One of them was wage issues. The wages were paid irregularly. Before 1-st April, the first day of the new budget year, there were some dismissals resulting from shortages in county budgets.

Often, agricultural instructors did not have a paid-up pension fund [16].

People's Poland (1944-1989). Split: collectivization vs. peasant farming support

In the conditions of the war destructions and massive migrations due to the changes of borders, one of crucial issues was the food security and, at the same time, installation of the forced political system. Therefore, the years 1944-1948 were transient. The reconstruction was accompanied by reactivation of many pre-war institutions, including agricultural chambers, and cooperatives. In the conditions of acute staff shortages – many advisors were killed, some stayed outside the borders, and those remaining in the country were often promoted to much higher positions – three districts were formed, grouping together several provinces: the Pomeranian Training District; the Cracovian Training District and the Warsaw Training District. An uniform training programme for advisers was applied. In this way, 453 instructors were trained until 1947, that is about 43% of all the staff. During a period 1946-1948, agricultural advisers were employed in the two categories: instructors for farm organization or instructors for rural households. Because for one adviser from each of these categories there were about 45 thousand farms with an acreage of more than 2 ha, other tried pre-war patterns were applied – leading farms and leading villages. The institution supporting the revitalization of the village were reactivated agricultural chambers [20].

With the strengthening of the new regime, there had been a growing trend of centralizing social and economic life and elimination of bottom-up independent social structures. At the turn of 1946/1947 agricultural chambers were liquidated. The campaign of the "battle for trade" was accompanied by subordination of the cooperatives to superior central structures – in the case of rural areas it was the Peasant Self-help Union. At the end of 1948, took place – like in other countries of the Soviet block – the imposed turn of the socio-economic strategy relying on the forced collectivization of agriculture and rapid

expansion of industry, especially the heavy one.

Adopted at that time, a reorganization of agricultural service served as an implementation tool of doctrinal assumptions. Part of it was subordinated to the management boards of agriculture at the voivodship and county level, and the rest was transferred to the political and economic departments of the State Machine Centers. The imposed duty of these services was the obligation to participate in the collectivization campaign and to persuade peasants to join the production cooperatives. Farmer's associations and branch unions were also liquidated. During this period, the previous experiences and traditions of agricultural advisory and self-organization of rural communities were largely squandered.

Correction of agrarian policy took place during the "thaw" of October 1956, along with the change at the top of the ruling party. The majority of agricultural production cooperatives, created under pressure, had been self-dissolved. Agricultural circles resumed their activity, but they no longer had their former role as a bottom-up structure – their main role was to modernize farms mainly by providing them with mechanization services. In 1957, agricultural instructors were transferred to the administrative structures of agricultural councils. Then, the position of the agronomist of the district was created (it included several of communes). He was formally an employee of a County Association of Agricultural Circles, hence his the main duty was to carry out his employer's instructions, consisting in setting up agricultural circles, organization of meetings and performing various administrative tasks [14].

Moreover, in those years, District Agricultural Experimental Units, subordinated to the agricultural departments at the provincial level, were established. Within their framework, specialist consultants were appointed. They were obliged to undertake experimental and implementation activities. Their consulting work included such forms as: demonstrations, farm visits, exhibitions and

trainings. However, in a centralized administrative management system, inspectors were guided by all the authorities of various levels, not always aware of the realities of agriculture and sometimes inconsistent. Lack of coordination of various decision-makers was not conducive to the effectiveness of undertaken actions, and being even source of chaos. Therefore, in 1968, the next changes were introduced. Agronomists, employed by agricultural circles, went to work in the Commune Councils, along with many other advisers from the agri-food industry, dairy cooperatives or associations. However, the methods of operation remained the same – the unconditional execution of top-down guidelines was in force leaving little room for strictly advisory activities.

Along with this, there were further changes in the organization of agricultural advisory services. Agronomists and zootechnicians were replaced by municipal agricultural instructors. The basic composition of the municipal agricultural service team was composed of: rural farm instructor, rural construction instructor, instructor for agro-amelioration, and – depending on the local conditions – such specialists as for orchards, vegetable growing, or sheep farming. According to formally written rules, the agricultural service should perform advisory, organizational, educational, and social-education functions. However, in practice, the agricultural service was still overloaded with administrative tasks, often replacing other institutions appointed to cooperate with agriculture.

Subsequent changes in advisory services organization took place in 1975, when in the administrative structure of the country counties were liquidated and the number of provinces was increased from 17 to 49. District Agricultural Experimental Units had been converted into the Provincial Centres for Agricultural Progress. The actions taken at that time meant some advance in bringing consultancy closer to farmers – the needs of farmers began better recognized and new technological solutions implemented more effectively. Each of such a Centres run its

own agricultural farm and its acreage varied significantly from 150 to even 4,500 hectares [10].

Agricultural advisory services (1989-nowadays): system transformation and European integration

The fundamental difficulty in the functioning of advisory services of the socialist period was the inconsistency of agricultural policy. Significant support was received by the nationalized agriculture, preferred by the state despite the fact that they gave way to peasant farms in terms of effectiveness. Under the system of the Centrally Planned Economy, private property was treated as an alien, unwanted body. During the 1970s, in spite of some important pragmatic solutions inserted by the E. Gierek regime (introduction of a pension scheme and general public health system for farmers and removal of archaic compulsory purchasing system), the policy of collectivizing agriculture was still carried out, albeit in milder and more hidden forms – there were administrative directives so that the land transferred by farmers to the state treasury was no longer available for sale to other interested farmers (it was transferred to an artificial structure, Joint Farms of Agricultural Circles, often with negative economic outputs). Only under conditions of a peaceful revolution, under the pressure of the agricultural "Solidarity", the stability of peasant farming in the system of socialist economy was guaranteed by a Parliamentary law. This time, unlike the earlier ones, due to the terrible and deteriorating economic situation, these records were respected.

Compared to other socialist countries, the specificity of 1980s Poland was characterized by an economic decline, but at the same time a greater scope of political freedoms. These circumstances decided in 1989 about the adoption of a strategy of system transformation. Radical economic reforms, described as a "shocking therapy" and known from the name of their architect as a "Balcerowicz reform package", were accompanied by much more slower political transformation.

The new situation in agriculture consisted of: liberation of prices, suppression of the hyperinflation that occurred at that time, liberal policy in foreign trade, resulting in an easy access of subsidized in the European Communities agricultural commodities to the Polish market (with simultaneous restrictions on the access of Polish products to the European market) and economic collapse of the state farms.

The “economy of shortages”, typical for the socialist economy [12] was quickly replaced by the abundant offer of goods on the food market. The first time for many decades, a farmer learnt that manufacturing of a product in his farm constitute only a part of his interests – at least of equal importance is just to sell it.

At the beginning of the 1990s, in the new system reality, subsequent changes in agricultural advisory services took place. Using the existing material and personnel base, Provincial Centers of Agricultural Progress, had been replaced by Provincial Agricultural Advisory Centers. Reformed system was focused on the needs of private farmers. Changes in the agricultural advisory organization included, among others:

- establishment, since 1991, of the Social Advisory Councils;
- withdrawal from the production activity (resignation from running own farms) – they became units financed from the public budget;
- subordination to the Voivode (the province governor) as funding authorities. Appointing directors through open competitions.

Budgetary difficulties, as well as competition from private advisory units, resulted in the introduction of partial payment for some consultancy services (this applies in particular to filling out applications for the EU subsidies or preparing business plans). One of the achievements of changing the mission of state advisory services was acting in accordance with the principles of grassroot development, taking into account the previously recognized needs of farmers and rural communities instead of fulfillment of top-down directives under the former political regime [22].

Introduced in 1999, changes in the administrative division reduced the number of provinces from 49 to 16 and restored counties as an intermediate level of public administration. They also caused changes in the structures of agricultural advisory services. Under the law adopted by the Parliament, agricultural advisory centers obtained legal personality and were subordinated to Marshal Offices, the voivodship self-government structures, with their co-financing from the state budget made via the Voivode as a regional representative of the state authority. The solution was controversial because of a certain two-partism. In the autumn of 2016, after eight years of government of D. Tusk (today's President of the European Council), the power was overtaken by the opposition party “Prawo i Sprawiedliwość” (“Law and Justice”). Under the provocative slogan of “a good change”, another centralistic and anti-European policy has been enforced. Provincial Agricultural Advisory Centres were overtaken by the Voivode Offices with resultant “tsunami” in staffing of managerial positions – all directors of the Provincial Centers have been removed from the posts, as well as a significant part of the lower management staff.

The work and scope of activities on the Provincial Agricultural Advisory Centre can be illustrated by an example of the Warmia-Mazury Agricultural Advisory Centre in Olsztyn. In 1990, the Voivodship Agricultural Progress Centre was located in Bęsia, in rural areas – following the reform that was adopted. It was then transferred to more easily accessible Olsztyn, the centrally located capital of the province. The Centre works for one of the less densely populated provinces but with well-recognized values of the natural environment (vast forests and the “land of thousands lakes”). In the former political regime, agriculture was dominated by state-owned farms. Therefore, there are larger family farms and a remarkable number of large-scale commercial ones. In the province, the average farm size is the highest in the national scale (2.3 ha vs. 10.7) and some of

2/3 of agricultural land is cultivated by farms above 30 ha [5].

As the first in the country, already after submitting in 1994 the application for the EU membership, the Centre undertook systematic propagation and training activities related to broadly understood European integration. Training activities cover not only farmers, but broadly understood strata of the rural population, including school youth. Since 1995, one of important areas of activities is development of agro-tourism. There is permanent cooperation with the Warmia and Mazury University (former Agricultural University) in Olsztyn. The publishing activity is carried out on an ongoing basis, including its own monthly "Bieżące Informacje" ("Current Informations"). In 1994 for the first time "Wama Agro Food" was organized and, one year later, horticultural "Uniflora". Then their number increased by, among others "Autumn Agricultural Fair", "Everything for a Farmer" and "Warmia-Masurian Exhibition of Farm Animals". For more than twenty years, the Center has been inviting all those willing so to its gates for "Open Days".

Already in 1993, cooperation was initiated with the Kaliningrad Oblast of the Russian Federation, bordering the region. A year later, in the field of cattle and dairy farming, a co-operation with a Danish consulting center in Skejby was established. Other foreign partners worth to be mentioned are France and Ukraine [17].

The Centre supports organization of the agricultural producer' groups (dairy, swine, poultry, cereals, horticultural and others) and assists farmers involved in agro-environmental programmes, including organic farming.

Activities for innovations The system of disseminating knowledge and agricultural innovations in Poland includes Agricultural Advisory Centers, Agricultural Chambers, local associations and organizations (NGOs) and state agricultural Agencies: the Agricultural Market Agency and the Agricultural Property Agency (merged, in 1-st September 2017, in the National Agricultural

Support Centre) and the Agency for Restructuring and Modernization of Agriculture. The flow of agricultural knowledge and innovations, in which Agricultural Advisory Centers perform a significant role, includes various forms and activities:

- organizational and economic (including subsidies from the EU budget);
- marketing;
- cooperatives and farmer group actions;
- production technologies;
- agro-environmental (including organic farming);
- cultural heritage.

Agricultural Advisory Center in Brwinów is an institution for "training agricultural consultants, agricultural school teachers, representatives of agricultural institutions and organizations, local governments, Local Action Groups, farmers and residents of rural areas, organizing trainings, seminars, conferences, competitions and other forms of professional development". It is a state organizational unit, subjected directly to the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development and having Branches in Krakow, Poznań, Radom and Warsaw [15]. In addition, universities and research institutes as well as other implementation units also contribute into these processes.

Particularly prominent results of Agricultural Advisory Centers' work include:

- implementation of legal solutions related to the Common Agricultural Policy;
- assistance in elaboration of the business plans;
- implementation of the system of agricultural accounting (the FADN);
- support of agro-tourism activities and other forms of non-agricultural sources of additional incomes;
- activities for the protection of the natural environment (agro-environmental programmes, local garbage utilization units, alternative energy sources, etc.);
- cooperation in creating local development strategies and reviving social activity of local communities;

-the traditional involvement is the promotion of new agricultural technologies.

Therefore, the scope of interests and actions undertaken by Agricultural Advisory Centers goes beyond the narrowly understood agriculture [11].

The European Innovation Partnership (EIP)

In the earlier part of this work, the achievements of entire previous generations concerning the introduction of innovativeness in agriculture were briefed. The constraints that hinder this process were also well recognized: the specificity of agriculture as such, a shortage of financial resources, deficiencies in the level of education, or fears of change, especially among older farmers. The contemporary proposal for solving the problems indicated here is the European Innovation Partnership, undertaken in recent years. This programme is one of the practical forms of implementation of the EU strategy "Europe – 2020 ", in which, among others, it was assumed that the basis for the development of the EU economy is to increase its innovativeness by creating a single innovation market. The European Innovation Partnership (EIP). It covers a variety of thematic areas, such as active and healthy aging of societies, water resources, raw materials, and smart development of cities and societies [21].

Since 2012, the next venture, the European Innovation Partnership – AGRI is introduced for the development of competitive and sustainable agriculture and rural areas. Supporting innovations in agriculture is focused on:

- more effective resource management;
- reinforcing the ecological economy;
- protection of biodiversity;
- development of innovative products;
- food quality.

EIP is a kind of platform with which innovative farmers have the opportunity to find partners with similar aspirations, to establish and strengthen cooperation and to exchange knowledge and experience on innovation in agriculture [18]. Information about its activity is spread by a monthly

newsletter "European Union Partnership – Agricultural Productivity and Sustainability", available online. In its issues, among others information, it can be found news about upcoming events and announcements about organized research projects.

The institutionalized form of such cooperation is the creation of Operational Groups, which include not only interested farmers, but also agricultural farmers, scientists, or agricultural entrepreneurs. According to the data for March 2018, around 600 such Groups operated or started their activities in the entire Union. Examples are "ArboNovateur" in France, grouping fruit producers looking for sustainable and innovative methods of fruit cultivation, in particular exploring irrigation systems and management methods assisting apple, plum, grape and kiwi growers or "UNDERCORK", the Portuguese Operational Group bringing together cork oak growers.

In the national and regional Rural Development Programmes, adopted for 2014-2020 (the seven-year planning period in the Union), a total of over 3,200 such Groups are assumed to be established [6].

The domestic response to these pro-innovation activities undertaken by the Union is the SIR – a network for innovation in agriculture and in rural areas. It covers different institutions focused on the improving the implementation of agricultural innovations. The central unit at the national level is the Agricultural Extension Center in Brwinów, coordinating activities at the regional level, undertaken by Voivodship Agricultural Extension Centers (the WODR). In each the WODR, a Liaison Officer is appointed, to whom all interested farmers or enterprises can turn in order to find partners for intended undertakings or to get required information. The Operational Groups are the bottom-up structures directly related to the implementation of innovations. They are created for the implementation of specific innovative objectives – solutions developed by them are addressed to a specific group of recipients and are a response to their needs. Their composition includes entities classified as:

-Category A: farmers, foresters, entrepreneurs from the agri-food sector, or acting for these sectors;

-Category B – covering the territorial units of local government, consumer and industry organizations operating in the agri-food sector as well as entities providing consultancy services and scientific units.

The Operational Groups obtain legal personality, which enables them to enter into contracts and undertake other obligations. They may also raise funds for their financial activities under the EU Rural Development Programme, the "Cooperation" activity, covering the years 2014-2020 [19].

This network has been operating in Poland since the second half of 2015. The designated Liaison Officers, who are advisors to the individual WODRs, hold working meetings, usually taking place in Brwinów.

CONCLUSIONS

Agricultural extension in Poland. Retrospection and prospects

Linking together research, education and innovation in agriculture is not something new – it dates back to the beginning of the 19th century, when the dynamic development of agricultural sciences was accompanied by the growing importance of transferring their results into practice. Despite the diversity of the political and social situation in the Polish territories, being under the partitions, the beginning of education at the agricultural university-level are dated for the first decades of the 19-th century, following of which development of professional agricultural literature is observed. Some decades later, the profession and ethos of agricultural adviser had been formed and a number of local social and economic associations emerged, being a good example of the grassroot development.

After the regaining in 1918 the independence, the interesting concept of the "social agronomy" was introduced to spread innovative agricultural methods into the practice in the vast context of local societies. A network of agricultural chambers was developing as a form of economic self-

government, with the support of which experiments were carried out in collaborating farms. "leading farms" were also co-organized to demonstrate agricultural innovations in their rural environment. A web of leading farms led to the creation of "leading villages". This rich heritage was in large degree wasted after the 2-nd world war, while the centralized socio-political system of socialism was imposed – agricultural advisory services were subordinated to ideological goals.

Since 1989, departure from socialism was, therefore, a turning point. Transformation and European integration processes basically changed various areas of socio-political life of the country, including the system of consultative services.

The strengths of public agricultural advisory services include: their legal personality, support from the state budget and the availability of experienced staff, knowing rural realities, well developed territorial structures and a relatively good material background. As examples of their achievements one can cite:

-enforcement of the Common Agricultural policy regulations (including procedures to get the EU subsidies);

-implementation of the farm accountancy (the FADN);

-support in agricultural practices for agrotourism, organic farming and pro-ecological measures;

-contribution to the development of producer's groups.

They have also their part to the revival of social activity of local communities and the increase of their ecological awareness.

The change of the system and related economic conditions resulted in the disclosure of a number of weak points, as well:

-due to reductions in running their own farms, "residual" participation in experiments, which weakens ties with science;

-political fluctuations and numerous reorganizations with the accompanying changes in the management staff;

-changes in the organization of agricultural universities, in the names of which, as well as their faculties, disappeared or was hidden the

word "agriculture" – this has affected the content of their teaching curricula;

-uniform organizational structure but diversified regional conditions – in particular, lack of sufficient preparation to address the problems of large-scale farms;

-reduced importance of apprenticeships of students, lower professional qualifications of graduates (as compared with former decades);

-low wages – limited inflow of new cadres, departure of young people after obtaining some professional experience.

Certainly this list is not a full one. A large part of the advisory work is dealt with issues related to the fulfillment of various EU applications. "These activities have distanced employees from typical technological consultancy – one of the advisers complains – those starting work after 2004 (Poland's accession to the EU) ... are usually specialized in aid programmes". Introduced restrictions in the limits of car trips meant that "advisors remain to work behind the desk to await for a client" [2].

Challenges facing agricultural consultancy result not only from changes taking place in Poland after the fall of socialism. The modern world has been changing dynamically, affecting agriculture and rural areas. The issues of insufficient agricultural income and the search for alternative sources of revenues, the aging of the rural population or depopulation of rural areas have been known for a long time. However, new threats appeared that demand quick responses: preventing climate change, seeking renewable energy sources, and protecting species diversity and water resources.

That is why it is increasingly important to exchange mutual experiences and to cooperate in finding the best possible solutions for these and other problems, both on a local, national and international scale.

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