

A LONG-TERM VISION OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT

SUMMARY REPORT

December, 2020

Vision
for rural
areas



„European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development: Europe investing in rural areas”

„Managing Authority of the Rural Development Program for the years 2014-2020 – The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development”

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The content is the responsibility of the Agricultural Advisory Center in Brwinów, Warsaw Branch



METHODOLOGICAL NOTE

Project assumptions

Main objective: Developing ideas, conclusions and ideas regarding a long-term vision of rural development.

Detailed objectives :

- **Engagement of rural residents (local leaders) in co-creating a long-term vision of rural development.**
- **Defining possible actions that would bring Polish rural areas closer to the realization of this vision.**
- **Elaboration of conclusions and ideas, proposals for activities in 4 leading topics:**
 - climate and environmental changes,
 - demographic changes,
 - digital and technological changes,
 - globalization vs. locality (including short supply chains).

Project Schedule

DESK RESEARCH ANALYSIS

November 2020

Analysis of existing data

MINI FOCUS GROUPS, n=10

November and December 2020

Online workshops with activists and rural leaders

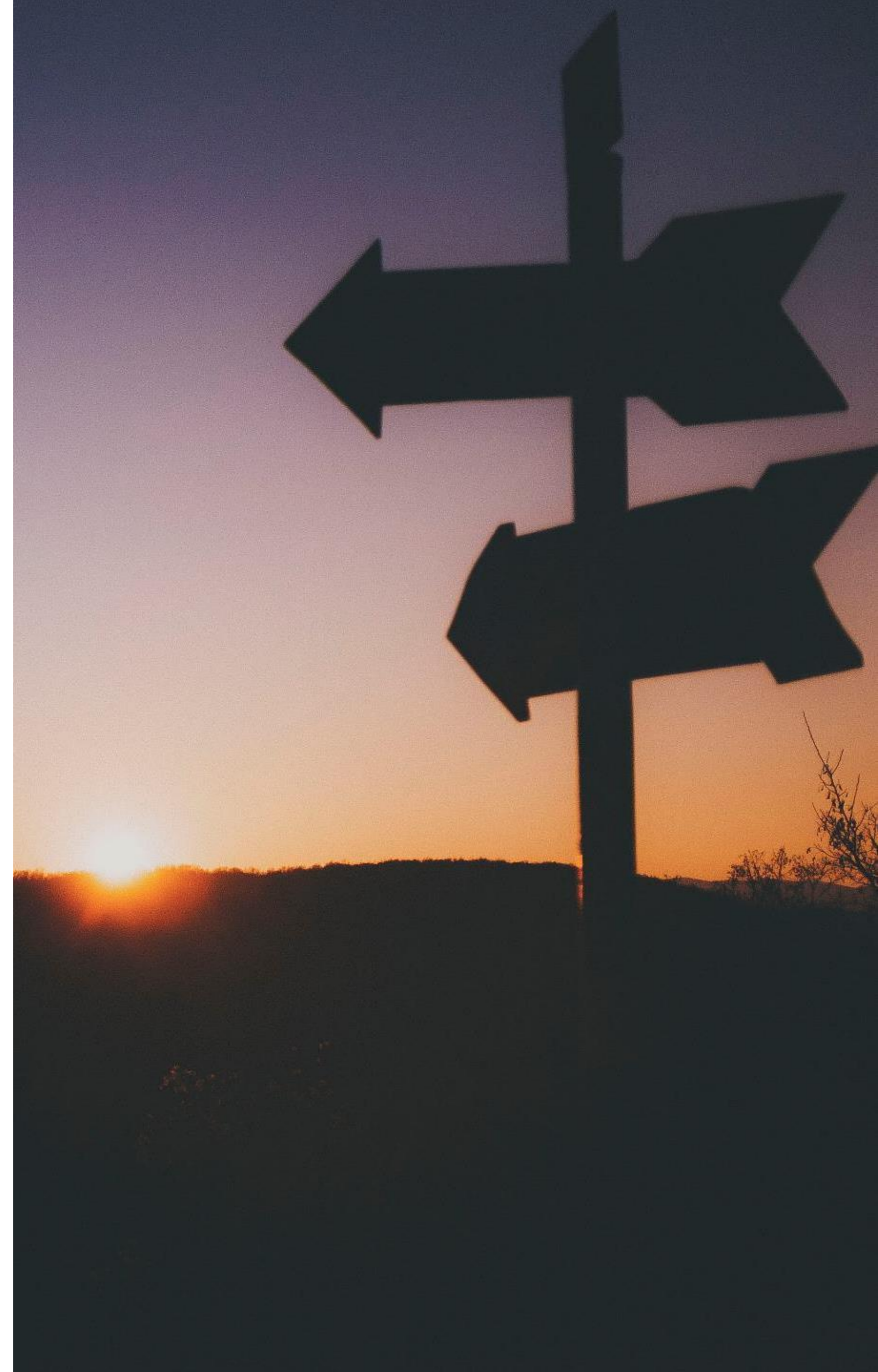
COMPETENT JUDGES METHOD

December 2020

Expert analysis of the collected materials

FINAL REPORT

December 2020



METHODOLOGY

DESK RESEARCH

Analysis of existing data (discussions and materials available on the Internet) in four main topics: environment, demography, technologies and globalization vs. locality.

Development of inspiring, example-rich, stimulating material for online workshops (mini focus groups). Desk Research was sent to all participants a few days before the online meeting.

MINI FOCUS GRUPS

10 moderated workshops in the form of online meetings with activists and leaders living in rural areas. Joint work on the basis of Desk Research and materials provided by ENRD (European Network for Rural Development). Substantive discussion (in groups of 3-4) on the vision of rural areas in 2040 - gaps, potentials and conditions favourable to development.

COMPETENT JUDGES METHOD

Expert analysis of the work results of the mini-focus groups participants in the context of the vision of rural development and possible activities that can be carried out. The same material was subjected to independent analysis by four experts from various fields: environment, technology and media, demography, supply chain management and distribution of means of production in agriculture. The evaluation of the research material was performed by experts in a given field of knowledge who did not communicate with one another while analyzing the material.

The method is used to avoid the bias of the subjectivism of the evaluator (FGI participants). The judges competent to evaluate the same research material are selected and each of them is given the same guidelines for assessing the statements of the respondents. Thanks to using a larger number of people assessing the statement, the possibility of misinterpretation of the statement is reduced.

WORKSHOPS PARTICIPANTS



- During 10 online workshops, we met in total with 36 people: local change leaders, activists or Local Action Groups (LAG) activists.
- Workshop participants represented over 26 different rural areas.
- We devoted over 20 hours to workshops and talks about the vision of rural development.



KEY FINDINGS

Workshop participants repeatedly pointed out that the shape of the future largely depends on the paths we choose today. The scenarios for 2040 may therefore be different, especially that there may be events and phenomena along the way that were not considered when designing.

One such factor is the coronavirus pandemic. It showed that even the best planned strategy can yield to ruthless reality.

**There is
no one way**

WHAT IS A RURAL AREA?

Participants of each workshop discussed, among others, what a "rural area" means to them and what this word means in terms of a long-term development vision. Nature and people were indicated as the two most important potentials of rural areas. The combination of these two worlds makes rural areas unique - still "true nature" and inventive, committed people for whom the environment in which they live and work is important.

Other elements indicated by participants:

- Geographical area: village, community, LAG area, region
- Culture, ethnography, folklore, regional identity
- History of the area, monuments, families living here for generations
- Agritourism, educational farms, theme villages - various types of tourism (also active tourism)
- Local entrepreneurship, resourcefulness, self-sufficiency, self-agency, self-realization
- Social integration - cultural events, joint activities
- Activities of local organizations, LAGs
- Cuisine, regional dishes, traditional cuisine
- Agriculture - regional diversity. The area of food production, animal breeding
- Being close to nature, clean air
- Social / human capital - old, young, leaders, entrepreneurs, farmers, visitors
- „Little Homeland“, „Local Homeland“
- "A place to live", "My place on earth: I live here, work, my children study here, I spend my free time here", "Here are my roots"
- "I feel safe here: less traffic, better air and food"
- "I am part of a larger community that works together"
- "Here I can decide for myself"



Climate and environmental changes

The impact of changes on rural areas and their influence on the state of the environment

KEY PROBLEMS

1

STRATEGY

Poland does not have a coherent vision and policy regarding environmental protection. Lack of public consultations that would bring measurable effects in the form of protection of further areas in the country.

As a result, many activities take place "from the bottom up" - without the support and credibility of the appropriate state structures.

2

EDUCATION

No top-down orders or initiatives regarding environmental education. There is still not enough education at the level of the educational system, most of the burden of promoting environmental awareness rests on the shortages of non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

3

AGRICULTURE

The agricultural sector does not believe in environmentally friendly production - organic farming is still a distant topic, "for the chosen ones". Agricultural schools continue to educate their graduates "in the old fashion" - convincing that profit can only be achieved with the use of chemicals and heavy equipment. There is no common knowledge of, for example, regenerative agriculture.

THE GREATEST POTENTIALS



Natural conditions

Poland still has adequate natural resources that should be cared for and used wisely. Many trends and changes are happening in Poland later than in Western Europe - this time it is a fact favourable to our environment.



Search for knowledge

Poles want to know how to care for the environment. Inhabitants of large centers are usually more aware and transfer this knowledge to other parts of the country. It is important to take advantage of this potential (including children's education) and arouse national sensitivity regarding our ecosystem.



Theme villages and educational farms

Search and realization of modern ideas on how to build economy and innovation in line with the needs of the environment. Educational activity, promotion of the Polish countryside - protection of its areas against extensive agriculture for the benefit of small farms.

FAVOURABLE CONDITIONS



NATIONAL EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM

Developing strategies, ideas and solutions which will result in obtaining uniform knowledge by all Poles - regardless of age, profession and level of other competences. Implementation of the necessary "database" of information on the natural environment, biodiversity and the functioning of the ecosystem in Poland and in the world.



NEW EXPERTS

Environmental specialists with the appropriate background of modern knowledge based on the latest research. Open to new directions and approaches in environmental protection and designing everyday life in an ecosystem-friendly way. Their presence is essential both at the level of education in schools (children and adolescents) as well as in the agricultural sector (schools and helping conventional farmers make a positive change).



REGENERATIVE AGRICULTURE

A radical change in the approach to agricultural production - from large-scale conventional agriculture to regenerative agriculture, considering biodiversity. Creation of an appropriate infrastructure, starting from education, a database of good practices or study visits to the implementation of the so-called "Hubs" - centers enabling shortening the supply chain "from field to table" with possibly personal contact with the final consumer. Promotion of natural, organic food and thus the methods of its production / cultivation.

EDUCATION

According to the inhabitants of rural areas, today Poland lacks not only environmental education, but also an idea for it. NGOs most often take up this challenge and try to spread environmental knowledge and attitudes on their own.

Education that will be conducive to the development of rural areas must, however, have many dimensions:

- 1) Follow two paths - both at the structural level (education in schools) and at the bottom-up level (local activities, NGO). It is important that the whole initiative has one common "guardian" - a person / institution that will watch over the entire project, without losing sight of the long-term goal of serious and concrete positive changes in the attitudes of Poles towards the environment;
- 2) Embrace both children and adults – it cannot be forgotten that mature people influence younger generations and should "lead by example";
- 3) To be conducted in a modern and adequate manner also in agricultural schools. Today, educational institutions educating future manufacturers, for example, of food are not leaders of change or centers promoting modern pro-environmental approaches.

It is extremely important for the new environmental education strategy to include specialists who are not only professional in terms of content, but also provide support at the level of practice and implementation. They must be armed with the latest knowledge about the environment: changes, threats and opportunities. Perhaps this role may be played by Agricultural Advisory Center specialists because it is equally important to reach the inhabitants of rural areas and be able to establish contacts with them.

According to experts...

Mateusz Galica

Head of the largest Polish knowledge project on climate change „Ziemiańskie Atakuja” (“Earthlings Attack”).



78% of Poles already see that the Earth is at a critical moment and that in order to remedy it, we must act immediately. Something is wrong with the natural environment - this is no longer the cry of activists, but the fear of the majority of society. What exactly is wrong

*—
it is not known, because there is no reliable knowledge on this subject. Consumers, electorate and people are looking more and more nervously for solutions, searching for clues to follow.*

Climate experts agreed that the three main areas of action to reduce the destructive impact of humans on the environment are:

- 1. Energy - reducing energy consumption and replacing energy sources with renewable ones.*
- 2. Transport – a change in the approach to movement, the transition from individual transport to public transport.*
- 3. **Agriculture – a change of the nutritional model: first of all, gradual abandonment of meat production (and consumption) and transition to short, local supply chains.***

Cities are responsible for emissions, for consumption. It is city dwellers who are becoming more and more aware of the necessity to change. And they turn their eyes more and more to the countryside.



Demographic changes

Population structure, earnings
and infrastructure

KEY PROBLEMS

1

UNCERTAINTY OF TOMORROW

The Polish countryside is becoming less and less agricultural. The number of jobs in agriculture is shrinking and other opportunities remain scarce. The opinion about the inhabitants of the countryside is still not very good in Poland. Young people do not want to function this way - they do not believe that they have a good future in the countryside. They want to live like in the city - they feel that it gives more stability and certainty of earnings with much less effort. They want a simpler life that the countryside cannot provide for them.

2

DEPOPULATION

Polish villages are becoming less numerous. Some of them are depopulating completely. As a result, many of these places are cut off from, for example, external financing. And although this additional money could improve the quality of life of the inhabitants, there is not enough of it to meet the basic criteria for applying for funds. Finally - small villages become even more marginalized. Living in them is a challenge anyway and additionally they are denied the necessary support.

3

INFRASTRUCTURE

The Polish countryside is still struggling with numerous white spots in terms of infrastructure - roads, transport, sewage and water supply. Communities often do not have adequate funds, which means that some of the inhabitants are essentially cut off from the world and their daily functioning is difficult. Such conditions are also not conducive to the development of tourism (if only because of access), which could generate new, non-agricultural jobs.

THE GREATEST POTENTIALS



NEW RESIDENTS

New inhabitants also appear in the countryside - there are not many of them, but they can significantly influence their new surroundings. Often these are city people who are looking for a "change", want to slow down, start living differently.

Sometimes they are adult children from "local" families returning to the countryside. New residents bring knowledge, experience and sophistication that can be extremely useful.



VILLAGE ANEW

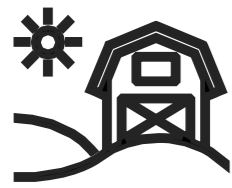
Contemporary Polish countryside is not only agriculture. Agritourism, educational farms, thematic villages, culinary routes - these are only some of what you can do today while living in the countryside. This opens up new opportunities for those who do not want to work in agriculture and, at the same time, going to the city is a last resort for them.



ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Rural people have "naturally ingrained entrepreneurship" and a will to act. Rural schools are centers of integration and community action. It is only when children begin to encounter the city that they become indifferent to local matters. Therefore, it is important to take care of this potential and open up new opportunities.

FAVOURABLE CONDITIONS



VILLAGE IS NOT ONLY TOURISM

It is important to remember that the countryside is primarily the area of life for its inhabitants. It is not only a place for tourists or farmland - it is family homes, relationships and history. Therefore, it should not be forgotten that the quality of life of the inhabitants should always be a priority. Thus, before investing larger amounts in, for example, tourism, local people should be provided with decent living conditions –the entrepreneurship will then be born on its own, from the bottom up, because the inhabitants will finally have time and space for it.



SUPPORT FOR LOCAL IDEAS

Rural residents must feel that their ideas for activities are interesting and attractive. Often, these are very creative visions, which unfortunately crash into e.g. bureaucracy or the requirement of own contribution in order to obtain more financing. By creating appropriate conditions for local entrepreneurship, there is a chance to keep people in the countryside - they will not have to flee to the city chasing their dreams and a dignified life. Therefore, it is worth reducing barriers (such as own contribution) in favour of real support, minimizing risk and concerns.



LONG-TERM VISIONS OF DEVELOPMENT

Rural areas often do not have an "idea for themselves". Looking to the future is short-range and actions are to give the effect of "here and now". In order to believe in the potential of the countryside as a good place to live and work, long-term development strategies are necessary - tasks planned for years, goals set for the future. Having specific visions on the horizon, the inhabitants know what they are striving for and feel the sense of their actions.

According to experts...

dr Anita Abramowska-Kmon
Head of the Demography Department
SGH



Currently, more and more literature and research are devoted to the issue of subjective quality of life and satisfaction as a dimension, next to GDP per capita, of the degree of socio-economic development.

It is worth watching, among others, statistics on mental health (e.g. depression), suicide, the situation of young children and adolescents, etc. This, in my opinion, poses a threat to the quality of life of the population and socio-economic development, not only in rural areas. The topic of mental health has been raised by specialists for quite a few years, especially in recent months. In my opinion, this subject cannot be underestimated. It is children and young people who will largely determine the development not only of rural areas, but also the entire country. It is worth indicating or rather preparing young people for the changing environment, increasing life expectancy and the resulting necessity to extend their professional activity as well as to acquire skills that allow them to change not only their job, but also their profession throughout their lives. Without changing attitudes, there will be no good social change that follows / precedes inevitable demographic changes.

Another important topic is the educational activity of adults (aged 25-64) and the forms of supporting it.



Digital and technological changes

Availability, quality, areas of support and threats

KEY PROBLEMS

1

INTERNET

During the pandemic, it became clear how important the Internet is and the quality of its signal. The Polish countryside, although better and better covered with Internet coverage, still struggles with the lack of access to a stable connection. It limits not only educational opportunities (online school), settling various matters (shopping, offices) but also running a business, e.g. agricultural. The access to platforms such as e-bazarek becomes limited and opportunities of direct sales even more difficult.

2

LACK OF KNOWLEDGE

Polish countryside, although interested in modern solutions, has limited knowledge about the possibilities of using modern technologies, e.g. in small farms. Today it is the domain of large-scale farmers. The access to technology is difficult - both in terms of finance and competence. It is also not clear enough what the service life of these solutions is, e.g. what will happen to the photovoltaic panels in a dozen or so years? What will their disposal look like and who will bear the costs?

THE GREATEST POTENTIALS



IN HARMONY WITH NATURE

One of the most important potentials of the village is its direct proximity to nature. Thanks to new technologies, such as energy from renewable resources, the countryside can be even more environmentally friendly and can be a promoter of this type of ecological activities.



MODERN FARMER

The Polish countryside has already had its first experience with the use of technology in agricultural production. Thus, there is a desire to use new, even more modern solutions that will improve production and make the farmer's work even less physical.



YES TO MODERNITY

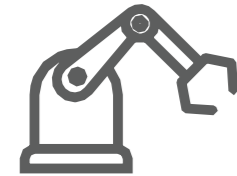
The potential of the Polish countryside is a great interest in modern technological solutions. They are so important because they help to overcome physical barriers, e.g. in the form of the lack of shops in the neighborhood or adequate transport. Technologies in everyday life in rural areas are used with comparable ease as in cities.

FAVOURABLE CONDITIONS



GREEN ENERGY PROMOTION

Rural areas are a great place to promote and implement, among others, renewable energy. It is worth creating such conditions in which renewable energy constitutes a strategy for the entire rural community - a long-term goal, the achievement of which will be a common success. It will not only integrate the inhabitants of a given area but will also support a sense of shared responsibility and care for the closest environment - the state of the surrounding nature.



LEADERS OF CHANGE IN THE FIELD OF TECHNOLOGY

It sometimes happens that the lack of use of new technologies does not result from an aversion to it but from a lack of knowledge about its existence or the real benefits of its introduction. It is therefore worth appointing leaders of change in the field of technologies favourable to rural areas. Such specialists would help to diagnose which technologies are worth using and to what extent. They could also provide support at the implementation and optimization stage. It is important to create such conditions for the transfer of technological knowledge in which recipients will feel comfortable, confident and will have access to the latest, reliable knowledge.

According to experts...

Agnieszka Danuta Leszczyńska
researcher, project manager,
Junior SEM Specialist at the
Starcom media house



Both experts and local leaders agree that the universality of digital competences plays a critical role for social and economic development, both in the countryside and in the city. Due to the importance of this medium, it is necessary to popularize compulsory education in this field as part of the basic knowledge and skills required for living in a modern society (such as knowledge of the basics of road traffic rules, personal hygiene rules or the use of money as a means of economic exchange). Digital literacy should be considered in three areas: functional, security and privacy.

However, competences will be useless when in many rural areas the access to broadband Internet is still difficult, unstable or even absent. The certainty of a fast connection is essential both for agriculture of the future (smart villages, Internet of things) and for running any other business, especially education and remote work. Poland is still below the EU average when it comes to this indicator. The Central Statistical Office reports that in 2020 88.7% of rural households had access to broadband Internet. However, the definition of the Central Statistical Office is very liberal because apart from cable connections, DSL and FTTH, also cellular networks are classified in this category.

As a result, the actual access to broadband Internet - uninterrupted, stable, fast and affordable - in Polish villages is insufficient. The governmental National Broadband Plan is to ensure by 2025 universal access to networks with a capacity of min. 100 Mb / s, which would immediately require huge investments.



Globalization vs locality

Short supply chains,
networking, supra-local
cooperation of entities

KEY PROBLEMS

1

„BURNED OUT LEADERS CLUB”

Difficulties with finding local leaders and providing them with adequate support. Lack of a proper motivation system (both financial and in other forms). Disproportionate promises regarding opportunities in the face of the realities of regulations and bureaucracy in the actual work of the leader. The problem is how to use the inner motivation of leaders and not to waste it.

2

VILLAGE LESS AND LESS AGRICULTURAL

Rural areas are less and less directly related to agriculture. Crops are more and more often large-area, which also changes the landscape. People who flow from cities to villages make changes in customs and habits - sometimes trying to adapt the surroundings to their needs and ideas (idyllic village) instead of adapting themselves to the local conditions.

3

RURAL-URBAN DISCREPANCY

The village is still treated by the city as "a back room for real life". There is still too much contempt in thinking about the Polish countryside. A definite lack of networking and cooperation between rural and urban activists. The countryside does not know who to talk to in cities, with whom to establish cooperation to make it fruitful for both parties. Lack of full empowerment of the village and its inhabitants in the eyes of the urban population.

THE GREATEST POTENTIALS



Short supply chains

We still have many farms in Poland that produce food on a smaller scale and would be willing to sell it without intermediaries. The Agricultural retail trade model is also very popular. Moreover, Polish consumers look for certain suppliers, e.g. through CSA model - Community-supported Agriculture. Consequently, we have a good base for which we need to create the right conditions for development.



EU funds

The Polish countryside appreciates and sees how European funds allow for changes in the environment. It is fully understandable that this funding is necessary for the Polish countryside to continue to develop. Without these funds, it would be difficult to implement many projects that not only make the countryside a better place to live, but also activate its inhabitants.



Leaders and organizations

The Polish countryside is a place where, although it is not always easy to act, there are still those who want to make positive changes. The rural population has a lot of will and entrepreneurship - they are also strongly emotionally connected with the place where they live. It all depends on how this potential will be used.

FAVOURABLE CONDITIONS



LEADERSHIP PROGRAM

Searching for candidates, incentive system, support and minimization of bureaucracy - these are the key elements supporting work with leaders in rural areas. Having found local activists, you should constantly take care of them and support them also through, for example, changes in bureaucracy - reducing "paperwork", opening up appropriate financing or the access to experts. Therefore, the continuity of cooperation is important and not only equipping with the right tools.



NEW + OLD = THE BEST

An attempt to create a new reality in rural areas where the local population and incoming one create together an extremely creative, committed and well-integrated environment. Creating such conditions for the coexistence of "old" residents with "new" ones, which is beneficial for both parties, while maintaining the character and customs of the Polish countryside. This will be favoured by, among others, empowerment of the countryside in the eyes of the urban population - a change in thinking about the Polish countryside is thus necessary - at the national level.



STRENGTHENING LOCAL ACTION GROUPS (LAG)

LAGs already play the role of an important intermediary between the engaged rural population and the funding structures for individual activities. An important task of LAG is to help to "tame" bureaucracy - something that can effectively discourage potential leaders. LAGs also understand best the nature of the rural area in which they operate - the needs, opportunities and wishes of the local population. They are able to propose projects perfectly tailored to the inhabitants of a given rural area. Therefore, LAG, as an important link, deserves to strengthen their activities, to be more open to their suggestions, ideas, itp.

LOCAL ACTION GROUPS (LAGs)

The vast majority of workshop participants admitted that Local Action Groups are the key organizations in rural areas. They play an extremely important role of the "interpreter" between the world of EU subsidies or programs and their direct recipients. They can efficiently navigate in the world of "red tape" or manage budgets.

It is therefore extremely important to empower LAGs in their operations. For the moment, two most important steps can be identified that will contribute to providing the LAG with even greater efficiency:

- **SUBSTANTIVE SUPPORT:** sometimes people operating in LAGs feel that they lack knowledge and experience. It seems to be the most painful in situations in which they deal with municipal organizations which seem to be stronger in terms of content. In these situations, LAGs feel they are in a losing position.
- **MULTI-FUNDING:** the range of ideas within the LAGs' activities is increasingly going beyond the funds for which they can apply. As LAGs perfectly know the needs of the inhabitants of their area, it can be stated with a high degree of certainty that opening up funds previously unavailable to LAGs will have positive consequences for the activities undertaken by the organizations and thus for the development of the rural areas themselves. LAGs are ready for multi-funding - they are only waiting for their chance.



MATERIALS FROM WORKSHOPS



Key defects and barriers

Everything we see today as
gaps and limitations
hampering the development of
rural areas

KEY DEFECTS/BARRIERS

ENVIRONMENT

- Lack of a coherent strategy regarding environmental education - insufficient education at the level of the education system, most of the burden of promoting environmental awareness rests on the shortages of non-governmental organizations.
- Lack of an "idea" (coherent policy) for nationwide environmental activities.
- The agricultural sector has too little faith in environmentally friendly production.
- The village is less and less agricultural. Small farms are now a rare sight. Instead of farmers, we have enterprises that produce low-quality food in a mechanized manner.
- Lack of certainty about the real consequences of climate change and other external events, such as pandemics - difficulties with planning the future, thinking about investments.

SOCIETY

- Migration of young people from the countryside to the cities - there is no idea how to keep them in the countryside and convince them that it is possible to live prosperously and well here.
- Population from cities who changes the face of the village "in its own way".
- Local social conflicts - differences of interests but also the failure of "visitors" to adapt to local customs
- "Polish mentality" - we find it hard to be happy with the success of others, we like splendor ourselves, which does not always favour cooperation. Moreover, we still complain more than we act.
- Local leaders burn out quickly - lack of proper support, motivation system, non-financial ideas on how to say "Thank you".
- There are still too few jobs that are not directly related to agriculture – because of that, people are running to cities.
- Uncertainty about new technologies such as solar panels. Do we know how we will recycle them in the future? Will they not be more of a problem than good? Sometimes there is a lack of conviction in the community about new technologies.

KEY DEFECTS/BARRIERS

POLICIES AND STRATEGIES

- Unstable, fossilized and little innovative legislation. In addition, the ever-growing bureaucracy and too extensive formalities.
- Redirecting thinking about rural areas to tourism only - then the residents' needs and their everyday living conditions are not taken care of.
- No specific ideas for rural development.
- Lack of cooperation, networking and symbiosis between rural and urban activists. Yet the countryside and the city can learn a lot from each other.
- Too many promises that cannot be met in reality. Committed activists are promised "golden mountains" and then it turns out that there are numerous formalities, barriers, etc. It can be effectively discouraging.

INFRASTRUCTURE

- White spots in the field of access to a stable Internet connection - without it, it is difficult to join initiatives such as e-bazarek.
- White spots in terms of access to public transport - this is a restriction not only for residents who must go, for example, to a doctor, but also for tourists who, without a good road network, can choose a better-connected place for their vacation.

FINANCING

- Requirement of own contribution when using public funds - amounts are often beyond the reach of small organizations.
- "Funds not for everyone" - villages with too few inhabitants are sometimes excluded and remain without support.
- Local governments - they are "too poor", they do not have funds to improve life in the community and, at the same time, they "do not believe" in, for example, tourism, so they do not develop adequate infrastructure or promotion.

According to experts...

Mateusz Galica

Head of the largest Polish knowledge project on climate change
„Ziemianie Atakują” (“Earthlings Attack”).



The potential of rural areas is threatened primarily by the lack of a uniform and consistent development strategy. According to the respondents, the activities of the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development undertaken in this area were neither coherent nor effective. The potential of the Polish countryside in the face of the fight against the climate catastrophe is not properly used and is not noticed by consumers and by the interested parties themselves (rural residents). The lack of a uniform narrative that makes the Polish countryside face environmental changes is also striking - is it backward or has the power to face environmental and civilization challenges. What is its role? One of the best slogans - the leverage of the Polish countryside was the famous "Europe's granary". Perhaps today we would not like to take such a role but it is puzzling that in 2020 there is still no alternative slogan for the Polish countryside.

It seems that rural areas may potentially become the biggest loser of environmental changes and, on the other hand, an area of important transformations that can be opposed to these changes - both in the area of creating food production and consumption standards as well as in respect of the environment - also through the tourist and educational potential. How it will end - it is still unknown.



The greatest potentials

Elements that function well and can be an important basis for future action

THE GREATEST POTENTIALS

- Access to structural funds - real financial support that can be used effectively.
- Still developing non-agricultural activity.
- Renewable energy development: solar energy, wind energy, water turbines.
- Development of a small retention system.
- Development of economic, public and social infrastructure.
- Change leaders, local activists - their driving force is primarily internal motivation.
- Numerous, committed and well-functioning non-governmental organizations are already able to effectively shape local communities.
- Growing number of Rural Housewives' Clubs - more and more bottom-up initiatives.
- Less business competition in the rural area - every idea has a chance to be implemented.
- Natural and landscape conditions. On the map of Europe, Poland is still a country that can boast of "unspoiled" nature and wild nature.
- Polish countryside with its culture, folklore and ethnography.
- Theme villages initiative.
- Great interest in digital solutions - in agriculture but also in everyday life. Thanks to the Internet, infrastructural limitations in the countryside (e.g. a limited number of shops) are less severe.
- A school in the countryside as a place of local activity - it is not only a place for children's education but also for meetings of local people. Cooperation of children, parents and teachers - learning independence and entrepreneurship.
- Huge human capital - we still have a lot of people in the countryside "who are willing." There are also those who return to the countryside after years of living in the city - with new ideas, willingness and skills.

According to experts...

Piotr Ostaszewski

Founder and president of Agricultural cooperative „Ostoja Natury”



Digital change is a great opportunity for agriculture. It allows, among others, to shorten communication and, thus, facilitate contacts (finding customers, colleagues). Consequently, it will support the shortening of the supply chain in the "farm to fork" model. In addition, farmers can promote themselves and their products through Social Media. They can use YouTube channels or Facebook profiles for this purpose. In this way, it is possible to engage consumers and reduce the distance between the recipient and the producer. It is also a chance to show that a farmer's job can be as great as a job in the city. Content posted on the web can also be based on global trends, such as the circular economy.

Importantly for young people, the "Smart" reality is the world they already live in. Thanks to technological development, they have a chance to fully participate in it, while remaining in the countryside.

In my opinion, the promotion of farmers online is very real. Such actions can bear fruit after just one year and, after five years, they can become the main means of communication. It is also another measure to eliminate middlemen and to help reduce costs. All this brings food producers closer to self-sufficiency.

It is worth remembering that the development of technology is an important potential because, on the one hand, robotization and mechanization help in management and, on the other hand, it makes working in agriculture more physically safe.



Favourable conditions

A vision of reality that will promote positive changes in rural areas

FAVOURABLE CONDITIONS

- Wide access to EU funds.
- Strengthening Local Action Groups
- Creating rural brands, e.g. marking the Culinary Product Trail
- Creating a "Best Practice Book", e.g. for farmers who want to make a transfer from conventional farming to regenerative, organic one
- Directing programs and funds to organizations (and people) prepared for it - while reducing unnecessary bureaucracy
- Improving access to broadband Internet
- A coherent strategy in terms of pro-environmental attitudes and policy: education of farmers, consumers, children, residents - sensitization to the common good, which is nature, to which we still have access
- Three-sector cooperation: local government, entrepreneurs and NGOs.
- Setting long-term goals and strategies.
- Laws and regulations that help create development.
- Greater outlays on the promotion of leisure in the Polish countryside - we already have a rich base, now it is enough to convince Poles to use it.
- Development of a shortened supply chain model - greater facilitation in Agricultural Retail Trade, creation of local "Hubs" and their online versions, thanks to which farmers can "prepare" and sell their products by the shortest possible route to customers.
- Rural-urban cooperation at the level of, for example, social organizations, associations, etc. Showing the city how it can coexist with the village and not just "use it". A change in a contemptuous approach to the Polish countryside.
- Networking on many levels - people, organizations, activities.
- Creating a "Knowledge Base" for local residents - Hub where they can gain knowledge from various areas.
- Establishment of water companies and integrated plant protection.

According to experts...

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Many workshop participants indicated the lack of tools for the development of short supply chains as a barrier which would limit the intermediation of third parties in the distribution of agricultural products to the final consumer and thus increase farmers' income from their activity. The events of recent years show that large food chains - although nominally and in terms of PR support Polish food producers - do not always treat them fully honestly. The most recent example is the 723 million fine imposed on Jeronimo Martins Polska by the Office of Competition and Consumer Protection. The owner of Biedronka discount store was to force suppliers - mainly fruit and vegetable producers - to grant ex post commercial "discounts" so that the contractor for the delivered goods received a significantly lower remuneration than specified in the contract. Unfortunately, direct distribution projects (cooperatives, online marketplaces, etc.) are still very niche initiatives that need huge support from public institutions so that they can compete with traditional channels.

The idea of creating web-based hubs that would help connect agricultural producers and potential consumers seems very promising. However, it should be remembered that the creation and implementation of such professional platforms involves large costs for investments and their ongoing maintenance. On the other hand, the use of ready-made solutions is associated with the risk of losing control over the project and, as a result, its unprofitability for producers. An example can be highly unfavorable contracts of dining establishments with global suppliers of technologies (Uber Eats, Bolt Food, Glovo, etc.) used for local sales. Creation of a mobile and online platform to popularize short supply chains is certainly one of the development priorities for Polish agriculture.

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