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**AGRICULTURAL AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT AND
INTERNATIONAL VIEW**

AGRÁR- ÉS VIDÉKFEJLESZTÉS, NEMZETKÖZI KITEKINTÉS

TRADITION OR INNOVATION – WHICH APPROACH IS BETTER IN RURAL DEVELOPMENT? THE CASE OF PODLASIE REGION

PRZYGODZKA, RENATA

Abstract

The article makes an attempt to answer the question, which of the development approaches of rural areas might be better: the one based on tradition, or perhaps the one, which is related with innovations. The conducted studies indicate that rural areas are strongly diversified. Various types of economic and social activity, which takes place in those areas, require a diversified approach.

Thus, the answer for the question asked in the title cannot be a simple one. However, one can put forward a theory that the most proper development approach of rural areas is the concept of their sustainable development, in which tradition should be supplemented with innovation and vice versa. Only then will rural areas retain their heritage and at the same time will be a worthwhile place of living and economic activity.

Keywords: possibilities for rural areas, heritage, economic activity, Podlasie region

Introduction

The development of rural areas has for ages been predetermined by the changes in two key sectors, in agriculture and forestry. The general backwardness of these sectors in relation to the non-agricultural areas of production has resulted in the fact that the functional restructuring of rural areas was slow in terms of pace, and the live of rural population usually was of significantly lower quality.

Rural areas of the European Union have been the subject of its special care for many years. This is mainly the result of the fact that more than a half of the population of the 27 member states of the Union lives in rural areas, and these areas are over 90% of its general surface. In comparison with urban areas, GDP per capita in rural areas is, on average, one third lower, the population density is ten times lower and employment in agriculture is about ten times greater. Rural areas are usually more remote, have less-developed infrastructure and less-developed sector of basic services. They also face significant issues, such as depopulation or insignificant economic possibilities.

Poland is a country, in which the differences between the basic indicators describing the social-economical conditions in urban and rural areas are significant¹. This especially regards the level of unemployment, education, underdeveloped technical and social infrastructure, access of the population to primary market and non-market services. Against the background of general indicators, Podlaskie voivodship occupies one of the last positions. One needs to look for the main causes of this state above all in the historical conditions, the predomination of agriculture based on traditional production techniques, participation rate of national minorities of Lithuania and Belorussia dealing mainly in agriculture greater than in other regions of the country, etc. However, on the other hand, this certain kind of backwardness, a

¹ One needs to emphasize that analogical indicators in Poland, in comparison with other EU states, are significantly worse. Additionally, in light of the adopted criteria, polish economy does not currently qualify as an economy based on knowledge (GOW), as it has not yet achieved the minimum development level of GOW carriers. An economy is considered based on knowledge if the employment level in sectors - GOW carriers (education, science and research-development activity, high-technology industry branches, business services related with GOW, information society services), in total exceeds 15%. In year 2000 this indicator amounted to 9,3% for Poland and was significantly lower than in numerous EU states. [Kierunki, 2006]

mixture of cultures and nationalities, strongly solidified tradition, unharmed environment, are a great development asset of the region. One needs to be aware that this development cannot not take into account progress and innovation, which are characteristic of the 21st century.

Objectives, material and methods

The objective of the article is an attempt to answer the question, which one of the development approaches of rural areas is more proper: the one based on tradition or innovation? The example of the region of Podlasie has been used in the studies, which is strongly based in traditional sectors, techniques and methods of production, which at the same time occupies the last position in the country in terms of competitiveness and innovativeness². The primary source of data are the materials and compilations of the Main Statistical Office (GUS), the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development as well as the Ministry of Economy. The realization of the objective has been based on the method of descriptive analysis, comparative analysis and the functional analysis method. Thanks to those methods a general characterization of the social-economical situation of rural areas in Podlaski region has been conducted, its relative backwardness has been shown and the sectors, in which one needs to maintain tradition and those, in which progress and innovation should be encouraged, have been identified.

Characterization of the rural areas of Podlasie region

Location, natural and economical conditions

Podlaskie voivodship³ is located in the north-eastern part of Poland, the geographical centre of Europe. Podlaskie is the most ethnically and culturally diversified voivodship in Poland. Various nations and followers of various faiths have been living here for centuries: Aside from Polish population there are: Belarusians (about 48 thousand), Lithuanians (about 6 thousand), Tartars (about 0,5 thousand), Russians, Ukrainians, Gypsies, Jews. Additionally, the largest cell of Orthodox Church followers in Poland is located here (about 300 thousand). One can find opulence of unique fauna and flora in extensive forests and primeval forests (Puszcza Białowieska, Augustowska, Knyszyńska, Zielona), some of which are the only cases in Europe which have retained their primal character. Diversified landscape, in its northern part shaped during the last Baltic glaciation, in the remaining area - during the middle-Polish glaciation. The climate, in comparison with other regions of Poland, is more harsh, and Suwałki are called the "Polish cold pole". The climatic conditions result in a long snowy period (over 3 months) and a shorter vegetative period of plants amounting to 190-205 days. Podlaskie voivodship is one of the ecologically cleanest regions of Poland - lowest emission

² In order to determine the competitive position of regions, data related mainly with innovativeness of enterprises available for voivodships have been analyzed, meaning the number of active enterprises from the group of small and medium enterprises in year 2002, the number of scientific facilities in year 2002, internal expenditures for R+D activity in general in year 2002, expenditures for innovative activity in industry in year 2002, the number of national inventions registered at the Patent Office of the Republic of Poland in 2002, the number of applications for financial support of investments in years 2002-2004 and the number of companies in the sectors of medium-high and high technology in year 2000. The highest level of the "competitiveness indicator" determined this way was achieved in Mazowieckie voivodship (about 120 points), and the lowest one - in Podlaskie voivodship (about 25 points) [Kierunki, 2006].

³ From the historical point of view the limits of Podlasie are located slightly differently in comparison to the limits of Podlaskie voivodship, which was created in 1998, however serious difficulties with collecting information on the functioning of rural areas of historic Podlasie region have limited the analyses mainly to the voivodship.

(aside from warmińsko-mazurskie voivodship) of dust (5,4 thousand tons) and gas (23 thousand tons) pollution. Legal protection, which encompasses almost 40% of the voivodship's surface, is to maintain this state. Four national parks of Podlaski region are especially appreciated - the oldest in Poland Białowiecki National Park, as well as the largest in terms of surface - Biebrzański National Park. The two remaining national parks are the wigierski and narwiański parks. Protection of nature and the natural environment in Podlaskie voivodship also covers 3 landscape parks, 85 natural reservations and 2051 monuments of nature.

The economy of Podlaskie is agricultural in nature, which is indicated by the rate of persons working in agriculture, which is higher than on average in the country, and which amounted to 35,9% in year 2004 (17% in Poland in general). However, the indicators, which characterize the effectiveness of this economy, are higher. For instance, GDP per capita was 18 056 zł in year 2004, while in Poland it amounted to 24 181 zł, gross added value per 1 employed person was 48 182 zł (63 561 zł in Poland), investment expenditures per capita amounted to 51 zł (146 zł in Poland). Additionally, the entrepreneurship and innovativeness indicators are significantly lower. 741 companies per 10000 population were registered with the REGON system in Podlaskie voivodship, while in Poland in general - 948 companies, the research-development expenditures per capita were 43 zł (135 in Poland), and the number of research-development employees per 1000 professionally active persons amounted to 2,4 (3,6 in Poland).

Infrastructure of the region is not without significance for the economy's development. The analysis of two primary elements of technical infrastructure, meaning public roads and railroads, indicates a significant underdevelopment of the region. The example of the network or hard-surface public roads was 54,6 km/100 km² in year 2004 (81,2km/100km² in Poland), and the network of railroads - 3,3 km/100km² (6,5 respectively in Poland).

One needs to emphasize that the non-agricultural sectors of the economy have developed mainly in urban centers, especially in Białystok, Suwałki and Łomża. This means that the analyzed indicators are significantly lower in the rural areas of the voivodship. According to the TERYT system the surface of rural areas amounted to 95,5% of the general area in year 2005 and was populated by 40,8% of the general population. The characteristic feature of Podlasie is the population density factor, which is twice as low as on average in the country and amounts to 25 persons/km². Similarly, the population living in a statistical rural settlement was lower (126 persons while the factor for Poland is 257 persons).

Rural population

In year 2005 the rural areas of Podlaskie voivodship were populated by 489,7 thousand people. This number, compared to the year 2000, has decreased by 11 thousand persons. Thus, also the percentage of rural population has decreased from 41,4% to 40,8%. One needs to emphasize that on average a reversed effect has been taking place in Poland during the last five years.

Men dominated in the rural population by one percent (50,5%), thus the feminization factor was 98,0 and was not only lower than the average factor, but it was the lowest in Poland.

General changes in rural population have been shaped by the number of births, deaths and migration. Natural growth⁴, which decreased from -1,5 to -3,3 and was the lowest in the country, was of key significance in the analyzed period. It is worth mentioning that although natural growth in rural areas in Poland also decreased during the previous five years (from 1,4 to 0,3), it was still a positive digit. These unbeneficial tendencies are also reflected in the

⁴ It is the difference between the number of live births and deaths, given in relation to 1000 persons.

demographic dynamics indicator, which reflects the number of live births to the number of deaths in the given period. This indicator has decreased from 0,9 in year 2000 to 0,7 in year 2005, while on average it has grown to 1,0 in year 2005. The reasons for the aggravation of the above listed indicators, and consequently the demographic statistics of rural areas in Podlaskie voivodship, need to be sought mainly in the significant drop in the women fertility factor⁵. This factor has decreased from 52,4 in year 2000 to 42,1 in year 2005. A similar tendency also characterized the average indicators for Poland, however the drop rate of significantly lower (from 47,6 to 41,3).

As far as during the nineties of the previous century the demographics of rural areas of Podlaskie voivodship was mostly affected by migrations and their balance, currently the effects of migration processes is lower. Admittedly, the balance of internal migrations (province-city) is negative, however during the last five years it has decreased from -4,4 to -1,0. On the other hand, for the first time a positive balance of foreign migrations has been identified, which in year 2005 amounted to 0,2. The above-listed effects do not reflect the general-polish tendencies, which indicate a significant growth of interest in living in province (internal migrations balance has grown from 0,3 to 2,2).

One of the important characteristics of every population is its age structure. Generally, it is the result of the above-described processes and effects. And since these effects are hardly positive, an improper age structure of the inhabitants of rural areas of Podlaskie voivodship has been shaped as their effect. This is certified mostly by a too high percentage of post-production age population (20,9%, while it amounts to 15,4% in Poland) and too low percentage of pre-production age population (respectively 22,7% and 23,8%). As far as a slight decrease of the percentage of post-production age population during the last five years (from 21% to 20,9%) is to be considered positive, a significant decrease of the participation of post-production age population (from 26,1% to 22,7%). A very high economic burden indicator is the result of these changes. It is a relation of the number of persons of non-productive age per 100 persons of productive age. In years 2000-2005 this indicator decreased (from 89,2 to 77,2), which should be considered positive, however it still is much higher than on average in Poland (64,5).

An important indicator, which reflects the so-called vivacity of the area, is the relation of population aged 64 and above to population aged 15 and lower in a specified population. High values of this factor inform about the ageing of population of the given area. In year 2005 the value of this factor in Podlaskie voivodship amounted to 102,5, which means that for every 100 persons aged 15 and below there are 102,5 person aged 64 and above. It is the highest value in Poland (Opolskie voivodship is next in line with the factor amounting to 91,0). The average value of this factor is 71,6, meaning it was over 30% lower. Thus, one may conclude that population's ageing is a serious demographic issue of rural areas of Podlasie.

Professional activity and unemployment in rural areas

Despite the slight improvement of the economic burden factor one needs to emphasize that there is the lowest rate of participation of production age population in Poland in rural areas of Podlaskie voivodship. This group has the greatest impact on any forms of activity, which may take place in these areas. Professional activity in this group in Q4 of year 2005 was attributed to 232 thousand persons, and the professional activity factor⁶ amounted to 59,2% and was 3% higher than in the country. The number of employed persons amounted to 207

⁵ Women fertility indicator is the quotient of live births and the number of women in their reproductive age (15-49 years old).

⁶ Professional activity coefficient is the relation of the number of the professionally active, or employed and unemployed to the total number of the professionally active and passive.

thousand persons, and the participation of the employed in the total number of the professionally active amounted to 89,2% and was one of the highest rates in the country (to compare, the general polish factor amounted to 84,3%). The employment rate was also high⁷, and amounted to 52,8% (47,4% in Poland).

At the end of year 2005 26,5 thousand persons were registered in rural areas of Podlaskie voivodship, 3 thousand less than in year 2000. However, the percentage of persons without the right to unemployment benefit has grown (from 83% to 90%). In general, if the number of the unemployed is related to the number of the employed, the calculated unemployment rate would amount to about 11%. Thus, in comparison with the general-polish factors, or the factors for rural areas, it is relatively lower. The primary reason for both high professional activity or rural population of Podlaskie voivodship and for the relatively low unemployment rate is, without any doubt, the high employment rate for agriculture. As in more than 98% of all cases it consists of individual agriculture, the statistics regarding the employed usually do not portray them. High professional activity is also the result of the economical activity of the post-production age population, typical of agricultural holdings.

According to the statistics regarding the employed according to economical sectors, in year 2005 the number of employed persons in rural areas of Podlasie region was about 30 thousand⁸. From among them, over 38% worked in the non-market services' sector. This employment was generated mostly by the public sector (administration, education, health services). The market services' sector on the other hand employed about 7,5 thousand persons, 25% of the general number of the employed. The number of employed persons in the industrial sector was over 8,5 thousand persons (28,6% of the general employed population). The small percentage of the employed (8,4%) was attributed to the agricultural sector⁹.

Agriculture

Agriculture plays an important part in Podlaskie voivodship. This is certified mainly by its participation in GDP's production, which in year 2004 amounted to 6,2%, while in Poland this factor amounted to 2,4%¹⁰. Additionally this is indicated by other factors, like the participation in the general number of the employed (35,3%, 15,6% in Poland), participation in the general value of gross fixed assets (14,3%, 6,4% in Poland), participation in investment expenditures (5,5%, 2,3% in Poland).

The analysis of the economical potential of agriculture and agricultural production of Podlaskie voivodship indicates that in recent years numerous elements have significantly improved, which is certified by indicators relatively higher than on average in the country. Above all, the structure of land used for agricultural purposes indicates a participation of grass-lands significantly higher than in Poland, which predestinates the voivodship to animal production. Thanks to the greater participation of medium and large holdings, the agricultural structure of the region is more beneficial than in the rest of the country. Also the land concentration level is higher. Although the level of workforce resources is generally close to the average indicators in Poland, the statistics indicate their significant excess, which impedes the structural transformation in agriculture. One needs to positively assess the improvement of

⁷ Employment rate reflects the relation of the population, which is employed to the population aged 15 and more.

⁸ This data does not take into account the employed in agricultural holdings.

⁹ Once again, one needs to clearly emphasize that individual agriculture is not taken into consideration in this sector, however forestry and employment in this sector is considered.

¹⁰ These calculations result from numerical data presented by GUS (Main Statistical Office). One needs to emphasize that completely different indicators are presented in the publication (*Rolnictwo i gospodarka żywnościowa w Polsce*, MRiRW, Warszawa 2006, p. 10). They indicate that the participation of agriculture in creating GDP according to the so-called verified data in comparison to Statistical Records from previous years, amounted to 4,5% in 2004, and decreased from 7% to 4,2% in years 1995-2005.

quality parameters of workforce, especially the lower and lower age of holdings' managers and their better education.

The analysis of the resources of capital in agriculture of Podlaskie voivodship, characterized by the value of fixed assets' value (buildings and constructions, tractive force resources, tractors and agricultural machines) as well as the expenditures of current assets, indicates that as far as the level of equipment of agricultural holdings can be considered satisfactory, the utilization of current assets (fertilizer, feeds) places the voivodship in one of the last positions in the country.

The structure of global agricultural production shows a significant advantage of animal production. Participation of this production amounts to almost 90% of commodity production. The main product sold by the farmers from podlaski region is milk (second position in the country) and animals for slaughter. Among the plant products the dominating ones are the production of cereals and potatoes, the crops of which, due to the soil-climatic conditions worse than on average in the country, are lower.

The adaptation of the farmers from podlaski region to the market requirements has speeded up the process of holdings' specialization, in which holdings specialized in cattle breeding and field crops predominate. The ranking of holdings, which conduct agricultural activities according to the economic classes' size measured in ESU, which places Podlaskie voivodship in the country lead, is significantly more beneficial thanks to this.

Extra-agricultural economic activity in rural areas

The primary economic activity of rural areas (and at the same time their primary function) is usually agriculture¹¹, sometimes supplemented by forestry. This is the result of the spatial production character of both sectors of the economy. Their domination is however related not only with area development, but also with generating workplaces and incomes of rural population. As these incomes are relatively lower, for various reasons, the concept of multifunctional development of rural areas has been promoted for several years, meaning a development, in which aside from the traditional functions also supplementary functions will be created. Thanks to them new workplaces will be created, elicitation of excess and unneeded labor resources in agriculture will take place, population's incomes will grow, and the quality of life in rural areas will improve. One of the approaches in shaping the multifunctionality of rural areas is entrepreneurship, in which the economic activity of rural areas' population materializes. The manifestation of this entrepreneurship is the undertaking of economic activity by physical persons.

In year 2005 the number of persons conducting extra-agricultural economic activities registered with the REGON system amounted to 72 thousand, of which over 80% regarded urban areas. The saturation factor of rural areas with economic entities (the number of entities per 1000 persons) was 35,9 and was higher than in year 2000 by 2,4. Both the level of this factor and its dynamics are significantly lower than on average in the country, which might suggest that the inhabitants of rural areas of Podlasie region are characterized by a lower tendency towards undertaking extra-agricultural economic activities, or this activity is hampered by various limitations and barriers. One needs to remember that the development conditions of rural entrepreneurship are especially difficult. This state is affected by, among others, the significant dispersion of the market and customers, relatively higher purveyance costs, weak promotion. An important limitation for entrepreneurship's development in rural areas is the lack of proper technical and social infrastructure, the low education level of rural population and generally difficult access to consulting services and information.

¹¹ A separate chapter covers the analysis of agriculture in Podlaskie voivodship, this it will be omitted in this section of the publication.

The analysis of the economical sectors' structure, in which the physical persons conducted their activities in year 2005 indicates that activity in market services dominated (57%), similarly to Poland. About 30% of the entities conducted their activities in the industrial sector and about 17% in the agricultural and forestry sectors. About 95% of such companies were single-person enterprises or employed less than 9 employees. Thus, they were micro and small enterprises. It is hard to consider them capable of generating new workplaces at an appropriate rate, eliciting the inhabitants of rural areas and at the same time attributing new functions to rural areas.

It is generally considered that the natural qualities of Podlaskie voivodship predestinate it to developing the tourist function. The state of these resources is often the so-called positive external effect, generated by agriculture and forestry. Such effects are not usually reflected in the remuneration achieved by farmers or foresters via the market mechanism, this maintaining the quality of rural landscape is accepted and supported by numerous government programmes. Such programmes are, among others, supporting the development of ecological agriculture or rural tourism.

The touchstone for the significance of the tourist function may be the number of whole-year tourist objects of mass-lodging and the average number of accommodations per one tourist object located in rural areas. According to the state on 31 July 2005 there were 93 tourist objects of mass-lodging registered in rural areas of Podlaskie voivodship, in which there were 5122 accommodations. In year 2005 on average per one object in rural areas there were 55,0 accommodations, i.e. 4,9 less than in year 2000.

If one was to assume that tours objects of mass-lodging in Poland = 100%, their participation in Podlaskie voivodship amounted to 3,2% and the participation in the number of accommodations - 2,2%. This gives the third to the last position among voivodships and, what is strange - the voivodships, in which the quality of natural environment is significantly worse are higher in the ranking.

In years 2000-2005 both the number of objects of mass-lodging as well as the number of accommodations decreased. the dynamics of the number of objects was 73,5% in Poland and 80,2% in Podlaskie voivodship, and the dynamics of the number of accommodations in tourist objects of mass-lodging - 76,1% and 73,7% respectively. For 100% of given accommodations in tourist objects of mass-lodging in Poland, the participation of Podlaskie voivodship was only 1,8%. The only positive aspects in the analyzed segment of tourist services in rural areas was the growth of the number of foreign tourists. Admittedly, the leaders in these terms are the Lower-Silesian and West-Pomeranian voivodships, but in Podlasie region the number of foreign tourists who use accommodations in tourist objects of mass-lodging has grown by 14,5%.

An alternative for tourism based on tourist objects of mass-lodging is rural tourism based on, above all, the potential of agro-tourist holdings. In general, in recent years the number of such holdings has not been subject to significant changes and is at a low level. The issue of actual identification of holdings rendering agro-tourist services is often their unregistered activity.

Agricultural infrastructure

It is the agricultural infrastructure that to a large extent influences the life in the rural areas. The mentioned infrastructure encompasses the series of installations and objects, which are understood by the term of the social and technical infrastructure.¹²

The current state of the living quarters as well as the living quarters construction industry is the basic element of the technical infrastructure. Despite the fact that the rural areas posses

¹² Taking the limited publication size into consideration, only a limited number of infrastructural resources were analyzed.

twice smaller population in comparison to the cities, the total ratio of number of flats for 1000 inhabitants amounted to 284,8 in 2005, whereas the same ratio for the cities stood at 366,3. In the years of 2000-2005 there was a large increase in the number of flats available nationwide, including the rural areas, but of a smaller impact. The rural areas of the Podlaskie Province placed second in the nationwide province ranking, taking the above ration into consideration, with the score of 307,9.

Living conditions are usually described by such factors as, the average total living area as well as the living area per person. Generally speaking, the mentioned factors are better in the rural areas. The living area in the rural areas was by 15,9 m² higher than the Polish average and amounted to 85,2 m². The same factor for the Province of Podlaskie amounted to 87,6 m². The described occurrence is the consequence of the predominating detached housing found in rural areas. Nevertheless, the average living area per person nationwide, was larger only by 1,1 m² in 2005, where in the rural areas by 24,3 m², in comparison with the Province of Podlaskie where the above increased by 27 m².

It is not only the number of flats but also the flat area that influence the quality of life. What is also important is the fact if a flat is equipped with waterworks connection, flushing toilet, central heating or connection to the natural gas network. The total percentage of flats equipped with the above features in the rural areas is definitely smaller than in cities, nevertheless, taking the five years which were the subject to examination, the feature definitely increased. In comparison to the nationwide statistics, the Province of Podlaskie does not look outstanding (table 1).

Table 1. The total number of rural area flats equipped with the basic installations.

Specification	Flats – in % of the total number of flats – equipped with			
	waterworks connection	flushing toilets	central heating	Natural gas network connection
Poland 2000	82,6	63,3	54,2	16,1
2005	88,2	73,5	63,5	17,1
The Province of Podlaskie 2000	71,5	50,1	41,6	2,6
2005	79,0	59,8	48,3	2,8

Source: based on [Charakterystyka... 2006].

The Province of Podlaskie also places below the nationwide average taking the density of the distribution network into consideration. There are large discrepancies between the density of the running water network and the sewerage network systems (table 2). The above points to the conclusion that a large number of households possesses own sewerage systems with own cesspools, which constitutes a threat to the natural environment. In comparison to the average statistics for the whole of Poland there is a fifteen times smaller density of the natural gas network; only 2,8 % of households is connected to the natural gas network.

Table 2. The density of the distribution networks in the rural areas.

Specification	The distribution network for the area of 100 km ²		
	waterworks	sewerage	natural gas
Poland 2000	55,5	5,5	17,9
2005	65,5	12,6	19,3
The Province of Podlaskie 2000	38,9	2,1	1,1
2005	49,1	4,3	1,3

Source: based on [Charakterystyka... 2006].

What needs to be admitted to be a positive factor is the fact that all of the factors noted an increase, which means that there was an increase in the coverage of the distribution networks in the rural areas.

What is of a great importance to the inhabitants of the rural areas is the access to the technical but moreover, social infrastructure. (table 3).

Table 3. Chosen infrastructure factors in the rural areas.

Specification	Number of		Subscribers of		
	Elementary school students	Middle (grammar) school students	radio	television	telephone
			for 1000 inhabitants		
Poland 2000	115	134	190,0	184,6	175,4
2005	108	170	180,0	174,8	137,7
The Province of Podlaskie 2000	86	134	195,5	190,8	197,6
2005	88	178	187,7	183,1	157,8

Source: based on [Charakterystyka... 2006].

There were 88 students for each elementary school in 2005 in the rural areas of the Province of Podlaskie, whereas the same factor was for Poland was 108. Generally speaking, the first were much smaller schools, and due to the falling number of children and financial difficulties their existence is threatened. The average number of grammar/middle school students is quite similar for the Province of Podlaskie and Poland. As the result of the Educational System Reform an increase in the years of 2000 – 2005, in the latter number was noted nationwide. In both, the rural areas of the Province of Podlaskie and nationwide, there was a decrease in the total number of radio, telephone and television subscribers. Because of the lack of concrete and sufficient data, the reasons for such state of affairs are to be disputed. It is probable that easier access to such devices as satellite tv, the internet or the mobile telephones is the cause of the above.

Tradition and innovation in the development strategy of the Province of Podlaskie.

Conveyed research shows that the Province of Podlaskie possesses characteristics that allow for its categorization of the region as a peripheral region nationwide and in the European Union. The factors that are used to back up the above thesis are the:

- low affluence levels, expressed by a low GDP per capita levels,
- low spatial, social and economical integrity,
- the economical structure with the prevalence of traditional agriculture and the low level of entrepreneurship,

- insufficient number of influences and organizations that provide stimuli for further development,
- lack of educated city areas with a dominant function that would influence spatial order and directions for social and economical activity,
- inefficient public communication within and with the outside of the Province of Podlaskie.

At the same time the Province of Podlaskie is the region of a huge and unemployed tourist potential. Small towns, interesting structures, locations of religious destinations and marvelous nature create an astonishing atmosphere of the Province.

The above points add to the undertaking of actions that would generate factors influencing the productivity rate. They need to take all the innovations into consideration, the element indispensable in developed economies that influences the rise in the productivity rates. They need to be based on the three cornerstones: research and development, knowledge and education. The aim is parallel to the aims of the Lisbon Strategy, revised by the Committee of European Unities in 2005. In accordance with the above the main factors will be employment and increase in GDP, spread with the consideration of the long-term and healthy development strategy and achieved by the wider mobilization of all available national and European resources. Moreover, there have been detailed disciplines outlined that are in need of priority actions to be undertaken, and that are connected to investments in knowledge and innovations and potential for economic activity, especially the potential for small and average-sized companies.

It has been taken as a face value, also in Poland, that the following period of programming has to be used for the conveyance of changes in the social awareness, especially the entrepreneurs, scientists and government administration, as a result of which the innovations will be seen as the most important chance for development for Poland and will create a solid base for construction of competition advantage on the local and international markets [Kierunki... 2006]. The above assumption was mirrored by the Operational Programme „The Development of the Eastern Poland 2007-2013”, directed at the four poorest provinces of Poland: the Province of Podlaskie, the Province of Lubelskie, the Province of Podkarpackie, and the Province of Świętokrzyskie. In compliance with it, the priority of the First Programme „Modern Economy” is to concern such fields as development of university infrastructure, infrastructure of the information society, support of the innovations, promotion and co-operation. Unfortunately, most of the data indicate that the aid will be mainly addressed at the province capital cities.

The development of the rural areas will be supported in accordance to the Programme of Development of the Rural Areas 2007-2013 [Program... 2007]. It aims at realizing the strategy of multi-functional agriculture by strengthening of the economical side of the agricultural households and the rise of the competitiveness rate of the agricultural and food branch of industry with a parallel securing of instruments aimed at differentiation of economical activities in the direction of obtaining and creation of alternative sources of income of inhabitants of rural areas. Innovations and support of the information society are inevitably written into that concept. What could play a special role in this respect are workshops and introduction of modern technologies in the agricultural production and food industry. In case of the Province of Podlaskie it is mainly connected to large, specialized farms, which are increasing their effectiveness and to food processing companies, thanks to which they will be able to achieve a rise in their competitiveness rate not only locally but also in Europe and worldwide.

What should be remembered is the fact that an equally important aspect for rural areas in Poland, including the Province of Podlaskie, apart from the economical functions and good conditions for social development, is their role in conservation and cultivation of landscape

properties and natural environment. The above should be mirrored by preservation of a good ecological state of waters and soils, the abundance of fauna and flora varieties as well as cultural heritage of those areas. What is more, it is important to preserve the traditional ways of manufacturing in agriculture and forestry and cultivation of traditions within local communities. All of the above actions find support in the agricultural and environmental programmes or even in the support for the activity in local communities via LEADER programme.

Besides agriculture and forestry, tourism should possess a special meaning in the process of the development of the Province of Podlaskie. Cultural and religious diversity as well as marvelous natural environment habitats should be its main product. The process of highlighting of those attributes requires financial backing and new methods of tourism organization, especially appliance of new solutions in terms of promotion and tourism information. It is this field that tradition should be supplemented with innovations.

Conclusion

The conveyed research shows that the rural areas of the Province of Podlaskie, possess much lower values in the factors equal for the rest of Poland. Nevertheless, the forms of economical activities are quite diversified. The predominant type of activities is the agricultural industry, which is constituted by large, specialized farms which are the only source of income and farms producing produce only for their own purpose and not possessing any links to the market. What is characteristic is the fact of over-employment in the sector and the lower productivity rate that stems from that fact as well as a major problem which is depopulation of rural areas and degradation of some villages.

The main concept of development of the rural areas, for Poland and the EU, is the concept of balanced development. The above stems from the theory of balance development, which main point is in compliance with the definition of the Brundtland Committee, that states „that meeting the needs of today by not limiting the possibility of future generations to meet theirs” [Our Common... 1987]. According to a more precise definition, the sustainable development „is the civilization development, in which forms and dynamism of economical activities, institutions and lifestyles (mainly the consumption figures) and size of population are of such size that every individual of the current and future generations will be ensured proper quality of life and all the aspects of such development are secured by the availability of the natural resources, ecosystems, and life support systems” [VAN DEN BERG et al. 1991]. The above definition also encompasses tradition and innovations.

Thus, the answer for the question asked in the title cannot be a simple one. However, one can put forward a theory that the most proper development approach of rural areas is the concept of their sustainable development, in which tradition should be supplemented with innovation and vice versa. Only then will rural areas retain their heritage and at the same time will be a worthwhile place of living and economic activity.

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