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THE ROLE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT ORGANISATIONS IN THE FIELD OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF EUROPEAN INTEGRATION BASED ON THE EXAMPLE OF THE OPOLE REGION

The basis of Poland's integration with the European Union (EU) is the creation of conditions favouring the free flow of capital, services, goods, information and people.

B. Mucha-Leszko states that "four freedoms form the cornerstone of the common European market: the free flow of goods, services, capital and people" [Mucha-Leszko, 1997, 22]. The process of adapting the Polish economy to the common European market depends on the creation and implementation of the necessary laws, that is to say on the harmonisation of Polish law with European law, together with the creation of the economic conditions in Poland, which will enable Poland to observe the principles of the free flow of goods, services and labour [Mucha-Leszko, 1997, 22].

One of the sectors in this integrated market is agriculture, understood to be human activity making use of the land to produce food and other products [*Encyklopedia ekonomiczna...*, 1984, 646]. Due to the differences between agricultural practices in Poland and the European Union, agriculture forms a particularly difficult chapter in the accession negotiations.

When describing structural changes in Polish agriculture, together with the phenomena of globalisation and integration, it is necessary to consider the basic goals of the EU's agricultural policy. These goals relate to land management and the functioning of the agricultural market. These areas form the basis of any analysis relating to the question of the

place and the role of agriculture in Poland's process of accession to the EU [Lichorowicz, 1996, 8].

The EU's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) is based on outlining goals at international level in the following fields: production and trade of agricultural goods and livestock, fishing, as well as positively influencing the agrarian sector and solving the social problems of rural areas. The CAP also defines mechanisms, funds and instruments, which are used to realise these goals in each of the member states. The CAP is one of the basic fields of EU activity and financing the CAP makes up a large proportion of the EU budget.

When considering the aspirations of Poland to join the EU, it is necessary to highlight the small scale and ineffective nature of Polish farms against the background of a tendency within the EU towards farms of ever increasing size, the use of labour-saving and highly efficient machinery and increasing productivity [Otoliński, 1999, 9]. Both sides in the negotiating procedure are aware that in its present state Polish agriculture is too much of a burden for the EU budget and that the process of Polish agriculture joining the CAP will be very difficult for at least two reasons. Firstly, the EU has decided to radically change the CAP, since the majority of its expenditure is spent on this policy. However, it is not yet clear what the final form of the CAP will be. Secondly, there are many problems associated with the Polish agricultural system. Many authors argue that the greatest problem is related to the poor structure of Polish agriculture, which leads to its ineffectiveness. On the other hand, others argue that due to the low costs of labour and a similar structure to the EU, in terms of crop production and livestock farming, Poland will be very competitive on the European food market. This competitiveness may cause worries amongst farmers and decision-makers in the EU regarding Poland joining the CAP. The CAP is based on three principles. The first is the unity of the market, which means freedom of the flow of goods between the member states of the EU. Secondly, on the domestic market, the CAP favours produce of the EU member states over produce from other countries. The third principle is that the costs of the CAP are paid by all the member states [Czykier-Wierzba, 1999, 11–12]. As can be seen the factors associated with the adaptation of Polish agriculture to the standards of the EU are of a varied nature, regarding both their source and their effects on other such factors. However, it is clear that local government could play a key role in the process of adapting Polish agriculture to EU standards.

This article attempts to describe local self-government organisations active in rural areas of the Opole region, together with the participation of farmers in the activities of such organisations. An attempt is also

made to analyse the changes in the nature of the participation of farmers in local self-government organisations from the perspective of integration with the EU. In order to do this, the results of research carried out in the years 1991, 1992 and 2000 will be presented.

The main research tool used was a questionnaire sheet. In 1991, research was carried out on 200 farms. In 1992 and 2000 research was carried out on 100 farms. The farms used in the sample were specifically, not randomly, chosen [Sokołowska, 2002, 15].

Local self-government organisations can play a key role in the economic development of rural areas and activating local inhabitants to become involved in such a process. The level of participation of particular local self-government organisations, together with their employees, depends on many constraints, on eliminating barriers to effective activity, the low level of trust, disheartenment and apathy. Conditions regarding the way in which the activities of municipal governments are carried out can be split into two categories: firstly, macro-social factors, resulting from decisions of central government, as well as national economic and social factors, secondly local factors which result from the characteristics of a municipality [Kozuch, 1999, 64].

Each individual village and municipality has its own ways of functioning and opportunities to develop. Thus, local self-governments organisations have a crucial role to play in the development of a given village or municipality. Such development can be achieved by:

- formulating a strategic plan, which should form the basis of the development of a village or municipality (a local programme),
- beneficial communication between municipal government and its inhabitants, taking advantage of the abilities of the local population, taking the wishes and views of inhabitants into account, this demands the use of modern, effective communication techniques,
- stimulating the development of entrepreneurship, especially small firms and privately owned farms, which – thanks to their flexibility – will play a dominating role in the economy, especially in rural areas, reducing unemployment and solving problems in the field of economic development,
- removing barriers to the activities of firms and so creating new jobs (advice bureaux, or gathering information on where advice can be obtained), creating a modern institutional environment able to identify and solve the problems of the local market and in such a way form the basis of future development [Kłodziński and Siekierski, 1997].

Institutions having their roots in two highly different political systems have been functioning side by side during the economic transformation in Poland. The effect of the “institutional vacuum”, which occurred when

institutions of the centrally planned economy were disbanded but new ones had not yet been set up, was unfavourable to economic development. Such a vacuum creates a great deal of uncertainty and chaos. In 1990 the rather hermetically closed Polish market was widely opened to foreign competition almost overnight. It soon became apparent that Polish agriculture was not yet ready for foreign competition, not only with regard to production costs, but above all with regard to institutional imperfections. According to J. Wilkin the most important aspects of these imperfections were the following:

- a lack of knowledge and understanding of the free market;
- the collapse of co-operatives storing crops and supplying farms with machinery, which were not adequately replaced by private institutions;
- the breaking of bonds between farmers and the food processing industry;
- a lack of institutions in rural areas involved in marketing, collecting and distributing information regarding the market, credit suppliers;
- a lack of co-operation between farmers in the realisation of their group interests [Kłodziński and Siekierski, 1997, 108].

Thus, although the change in the economic system brought farmers greater opportunities to participate in the decision making process, they were not prepared for such participation, since beforehand the role of farmers was limited itself to agricultural production. Considering these arguments, it is expected that Polish farmers will become active in the decision making process at a very slow rate.

The research carried out in 1991 and 1992 confirm these assumptions. The research carried out in 1991 indicated that the level of participation of farmers in the activities of local self-government organisations had fallen in comparison to the level of participation under the centrally planned economic system. However, it should be noted that as early as 1992 the level of participation of farmers in such organisations had started to rise again. Furthermore, farmers had taken an active interest in regional government.

Research indicated that farmers know of the existence of various local self-government organisations, including the Cultural Society of the German Minority (Towarzystwo Kulturalne Mniejszości Niemieckiej), which was set up in the Opole region in 1990. Despite this, farmers were not active in such organisations. The highest participation rate was observed for the Cultural Society of the German Minority (38%) and the Voluntary Fireguard, in which 31% of farmers participated. 18% of the respondents, or their wives, belonged to the Rural Women's Circle (Koło Gospodyń Wiejskich) and 13% to the municipal co-operative "Farmers' Self-help" (Samopomoc Chłopska). 12% of the respondents were mem-

bers of Agricultural Circles (Koła Rolnicze), 10% belonged to Co-operatives of Agricultural Circles and 11% belonged to the Dairy Producers' Co-operative (Spółdzielczość Mleczarska). Participation in unions of specialist farmers had also increased, with 9% of respondents participating in such unions.

The results of the research carried out in 1991 and 1992 thus indicate some progress in the adaptation of local self-government organisations to the new economic and social conditions. After a marked decrease in the level of participation of farmers in self-government organisations between 1989 and 1991, the level of participation began to increase in 1992 despite the negative effects of the transformation of the economic system. Such results permitted us to be reasonably optimistic in predicting a gradual increase in the activity of self-government organisations and the level of participation of farmers in them. However, it should be noted that local schools may play a key role in creating new attitudes within the rural population by organising additional programmes. Such programmes could promote a more active approach in the face of the difficulties that unemployment and other problems resulting from the economic transformation bring. Moreover, local government activities in the field of enabling inhabitants of rural areas to continue secondary and/or further education bring a change in the attitude of the inhabitants from being passive and harbouring pretensions to being active and entrepreneurial.

From this point of view the results from the research carried in 2000 seem to be particularly interesting.

In 2000 further research aimed at identifying local self-government organisations active in a given village and the number of farmers active in these organisations was carried out. The respondents also assessed the accessibility of such organisations, their effectiveness in achieving their fundamental goals and the contact of the leaders of these organisations with the local community.

The main aim of the questionnaire was to investigate the level of knowledge of farmers regarding local self-government organisations in the Opole region. The research indicated that self-government organisations are active in many villages in the region. The following organisations are most commonly stated to be active in the respondent's village: the village council (72% of respondents), volunteer fireguard (62%), Rural Women's Circle (53%), the Cultural Society of the German Minority (52%) and unions of livestock breeders (51%). Particularly in the case of the volunteer fireguard, the increase in the awareness and participation of farmers is not surprising. volunteer fireguards are amongst the oldest and most beneficial organisations in the life of rural communities. They

were set up as a natural reaction of local communities to the threats of fires and other natural disasters and have also taken over other roles in the life of the local community. It can be thus stated that the volunteer fireguard is a multi-functional organisation, whose range of functions is significantly wider than the range of functions of other organisations active in rural areas. In order to describe this organisation more fully, it should be noted that volunteer fireguards are subject to the regulations of the Act on Societies of January 10th, 1996, together with its later amendments. According to these regulations, the superintendent government office (in this case the regional president) has the right to inspect the activities of a fireguard, but any decisions can only be executed by legal courts. Hence, volunteer fireguards, as a society, are voluntary, self-governing, non-profit organisations, able to independently define their own goals and organisational structure, as well as passing internal acts related to their activities. Their activities are based on the work of their members carried out on behalf of the local community (Art. 2 of the Act on Societies) [Samulak, 1999]. It can thus be stated that volunteer fireguards have a fundamental meaning to local communities, which is reflected in the results of the research.

More than 38% of the respondents live in villages, in which farmers' circles are active and 36% of the respondents live in villages, in which there are municipal councils. These are organisations extremely well known to farmers. Some of these organisations have an extremely long history, e.g. the first such circles were set up as early as the second half of the 19th century [Kozuch, 1999, 101]. On the other hand, the Cultural Society of the German Minority, which is a very new organisation (it was set up in the Opole region in 1990), also enjoys increasing popularity, which is reflected in the results of the research carried out. The Co-operative Bank (Bank Spółdzielczy) and the Union of Silesian Farmers (Związek Śląskich Rolników) were stated by 16% of the respondents as being active in their village. A similar proportion of respondents (15%) mentioned the Union of Silesian Rural Women (Związek Śląskich Kobiet Wiejskich). A somewhat smaller proportion of respondents stated that the following organisations were active in their village: The Dairy Producer's Co-operative (12%), the municipal co-operative "Farmers' Self-help" (12%), co-operative of Farmers' Circles (11%), the Agricultural Advice Circle (Koło Doradztwa Rolniczego) (11%), co-operatives of agricultural producers (Rolnicza Spółdzielnia Produkcyjna) (also 11%) and the Agricultural Chamber (Izba Rolnicza) (9%). Only 6% of the respondents stated that the Union of Vegetable Producers (Związek Plantatorów Roślin) was active in their village. The most surprising result is the low proportion of respondents mentioning the Agricultural Chamber, whose

range of activities is relatively wide, often overlapping with the competencies of other self-government organisations, *e.g.* agricultural circles and unions of specialist farmers. In addition, this is an organisation which has been in existence for a very long time and thus should be very well known to farmers. This would seem to indicate that the Agricultural Chamber should be active in a large number of villages. However, the results of the research contradict this. It seems that further research should be carried out, in order to clarify whether this is a passing phase or a more serious crisis.

The results of the research carried out in 2000 indicate that the awareness of farmers regarding the activities of self-government organisations is much higher than the level of their participation in such organisations. The highest level of participation was observed in the following self-government organisations: the Cultural Society of the German Minority (31% of the respondents were members), the volunteer fireguard (21%), farmers' circles (20%), the Union of Livestock Breeders (18%), the Rural Women's Circle (16% of the respondents or their wives). Only 13% of the respondents were active in village councils, although 72% of them stated that there was a village council in their village. In comparison to 1992 the level of participation had practically halved (in 1992 25% of the respondents stated that they were active in the village council). The level of participation in other self-government organisations did not exceed 10%. 10% of the respondents were municipal councillors, 6% of the respondents belonged to the Union of Vegetable Producers and 5% to the Union of Silesian Farmers. 5% of the respondents were also clients of the Co-operative Bank. Few farmers were active in the following organisations: the Agricultural Advice Circle (4%), the Co-operative of Dairy Producers (4%), the Union of Silesian Rural Women (also 4%), the Agricultural Chamber (3%) and only 2% in a co-operative of agricultural producers. The results do not leave any doubt as regards the inadequate level of activity of farmers in organisations acting on their behalf and defending their rights. It was argued earlier that Polish farmers are not ready to actively participate in decision processes affecting the agricultural sector. Thus, although the new economic system gives them the opportunity to take part in this process, the process of farmers adapting to these rights is very long and slow. This is confirmed by the results of the research.

The research was carried out under different conditions, that is to say at the beginning of the transformation process (1991 and 1992) and later under the conditions of a market economy (2000). A comparative analysis enables us to observe directions of change in the functioning of

self-government organisations and the role in rural areas. The following conclusions may be presented:

- in comparison to the data obtained under the centrally planned economy [See Sokołowska, 1989], in 1991 there were fewer farmers active in each of the self-government organisations,

- in 1992 the level of participation in self-government organisations either grew or was maintained at the same level, in no case was there a fall in this level,

- between 1992 and 2000 there was a fall in the level of participation in the majority of self-government organisations, an increase in the membership of such organisations occurred in only three cases (Farmers' Circles, the Union of Livestock Breeders and the Union of Vegetable Producers).

One positive aspect of the numerical data obtained is that none of the organisations showed a constant decrease in the number of members over the period covered. The membership of two of the organisations (farmers' circles and the Union of Livestock Breeders) showed a steady increase in the number of members. The number of members of the Union of Vegetable Producers remained at the same level in the years 1991 and 1992 (1%) and had increased to 6% by 2000. One may talk about a steady growth in the membership of these organisations.

The membership of the remaining organisations rose between 1991 and 1992 (apart from the People's Sporting Union (Ludowy Związek Sportowy), but fell between 1992 and 2000. Therefore, there is no clear trend in the number of members of these organisations and only future research can be helpful in clarifying this issue.

Apart from these trends which occurred in the years in which research was carried out, it should be noted that in 2000 nobody declared membership in 3 of the 12 organisations investigated. These were the municipal co-operatives "Farmers' Self-help", the People's Sporting Union and Co-operatives of Agricultural Circles. None of the respondents stated that they took part in village meetings.

Comparing the level of activity of farmers in local self-government organisations at the beginning of the research period (1991) and the end of the research period (2000), it can be seen that in all cases, apart from the municipal co-operatives "Farmers' Self-help" and the People's Sporting Union, the membership level has increased. Nobody declared membership of the municipal co-operatives "Farmers' Self-help" either in 1991 or 2000. However, 13% of the respondents declared membership in this organisation in 1992. This is either a result of a very unfortunate choice of sample or a sign that of a lack of constancy in farmers. The dif-

ferences in the membership of the People's Sporting Union were smaller and fell from 1% in 1991 to 0% in 2000.

It can be seen that the membership of rural women in local self-government organisations has also increased. Although the membership of the Rural Women's Circle had fallen by a total of 2% between 1992 and 2000, a total of 4% of women declared membership in the newly formed Union of Rural Silesian Women. It may be concluded that some of the members of the Rural Women's Circle may have joined the Union of Rural Silesian Women. It can be thus stated that women have become more active in self-government organisations.

In all three years in which research was carried out respondents were asked to assess the activities of self-government organisations. In 1991 the respondents were asked to assess the role of such organisations in the life of their village. They were also asked what functions a self-government organisation should fulfil. The respondents mostly referred to production functions, *i.e.* supplying the village with technical means of agricultural production, giving services in the field of production and daily life, as well as services in the field of expert advice on means of production and the choice of which goods to produce, defending the interests of farmers and developing culture in rural areas. In the following years the respondents were asked to assess particular functions carried out by local self-government organisations (creating a market for agricultural products, developing culture and education, agricultural advice, as well as help in daily life). The analysis presented below compares the results of the research carried out in 1992 and 2000.

In 2000 the activities of self-government organisations in the field of creating a market for agricultural products were assessed rather negatively. On a three-point scale, 56% of the respondents assessed activities in this field as ineffective, 31% as average and only 2% of the respondents assessed these activities positively. Activities in the field of help in everyday life were also assessed negatively – only 5% of respondents gave a positive assessment, 41% a neutral assessment and 43% a negative assessment.

The assessment of the activities of self-government organisations in the field of agricultural advice was more positive in 2000 than in 1992. In 1992 this was the area in which self-government organisations were most harshly assessed, with 56% of the respondents giving a negative assessment. In 2000 this percentage had fallen to 30%. Simultaneously, the proportion of farmers giving a positive assessment increased from 2% to 18%. The activities of self-government organisations in this field had been negatively assessed twice. These results were a clear signal to self-government organisations regarding that the needs of farmers in

this field that were not satisfied and so it was necessary to develop such activities. The results from the research carried out in 2000 showed that self-government organisations had made use of this information. This is all the more important, since expert advice is highly valuable. Such advice should cover organisational, technical, economic matters and accounting. With respect to accounting, it needs to be stressed that no real advance has been made in this area and in fact regression has occurred. Under the 2nd Republic (between the two world wars) several thousand farmers kept accounts, whilst today there are only isolated examples of people keeping accounts. However, in France, for example, a complete system for the keeping of accounts by farmers exists, termed as the "new economic language of agriculture" [Wierzbicki, 1996, 138]. Expert advice and a swift flow of information are all the more important, due to the large number of small farms existing in Poland. There is no doubt that self-government organisations could and should play a key role considering the difficult conditions that Polish farmers are faced with.

In the course of this decade of development in the institutional structures of giving agricultural advice, various means of transferring information, knowledge and skills to farmers have formed. This results from the complex nature of the problems and specifics of a particular rural society, as well as the individual traits of farmers. This is also an effect of the need to adapt ways of transferring information to the goals implicit in giving advice, as well as the changing social and economic climate in which people making use of advice centres find themselves [Zawisza, 1997, 128]. All of these phenomena indicate that self-government organisations are adapting to the changing conditions and to the needs of farmers.

In 1992 the activities of self-government organisations in the field of developing culture and education received a neutral assessment. In 2000 the situation was similar. A slight majority of the respondents (53%) gave a neutral assessment, whereas 15% gave a positive assessment. The percentage of respondents giving a negative assessment of the activities of self-government organisations in this field was 23%.

In 2000 more than a half of the respondents (53%) stated that the effectiveness of self-government organisations had fallen in comparison to 1989. Only 7% of the respondents stated that self-government organisations were more effective and 37% could not state whether self-government organisations were more or less effective. In comparison with the research carried out in 1992 the results are slightly different. In 1992 23% of the respondents could not state whether self-government organisations had become more or less effective since 1989. It should be noticed, however, that the proportion of farmers negatively assessing the

change in the effectiveness of self-government was higher in 1992 than in 2000 (in 1992 68% of the respondents gave a negative assessment). The proportion of respondents stating that the effectiveness of self-government organisations had increased did not change significantly over this period. In 1992, 9% of the respondents gave a positive assessment, in 2000 – 7%. This phenomenon may be possibly explained by the fact that 10 years of economic and political transformation had not brought farmers the stability they had expected, which influenced their negative assessment of the activities of self-government organisations. Another explanation lies in the fact that self-government organisations, themselves, found it difficult to adapt to the new conditions.

The respondents were asked to assess the activities of local self-government organisations on a three-point scale in the following fields: development and modernisation of agriculture, protection of agricultural land, re-cultivation and enrichment of soil, servicing and supplying means of production, collecting crops for storage and payment for these crops, protection of plants and woodland, aid in the field of livestock breeding, development of social and technical infrastructure, training and advice, as well as installing water mains and supplying water.

In 2000 the most positive assessment of local self-government organisations was obtained in the field of installing water mains and supplying water. The effectiveness of such activities was assessed positively by 66% of those questioned, neutrally by 17% and negatively by 11%. The effectiveness of activities in the field of servicing and supplying means of production was similarly assessed. A clear majority (58%) gave a positive assessment, 22% gave a neutral assessment and 10% gave a negative assessment.

As at the beginning of the period of research, the respondents' assessment of the activities of self-government organisations in the field of storing agricultural produce was mediocre. Just 3% of those questioned gave a positive assessment of the activities in this field, a slight majority (52%) gave a neutral assessment and as many as 33% gave a negative assessment.

The assessment of the activities of farmers in the field of training and advice showed a clear improvement. In 1992 the effectiveness of such activities was assessed negatively by a clear majority of the respondents (65%), whereas only 21% of those questioned gave a negative response in 2000. In 1992 a total of 33% gave a neutral assessment, which rose to 40% in 2000. The proportion of farmers giving a positive response rose significantly (from 2% to 25%).

In 2000 the most negative assessment was obtained in the field of the collection of agricultural produce and payment for these crops. As many

as 45% of the respondents gave a negative assessment, 44% gave a neutral assessment and 1% gave a positive assessment.

The effectiveness of the remaining functions of local self-government organisations were assessed neutrally by 55% of those questioned, 10% gave a positive assessment and 21% gave a negative assessment.

Farmers were also asked the following question: "What other functions should a rural self-government organisation fulfil?" The following were among the responses to this question: creating new jobs in rural areas, setting up producer groups, advice in the field of financial management and environmental protection. In general, these propositions indicated a need for self-government organisations to widen their activities.

One interesting aspect of the research carried out regarded the influence of the farmers themselves on the priorities and activities of local government and self-government organisations in the field of agriculture and rural life. In 1992 as many as 68% of the respondents stated that they had no influence of the priorities and activities of self-government organisations. In 2000 the proportion of farmers expressing such an opinion had fallen to 34% with regard to local government and to 28% with regard to self-government organisations.

In order to assess the activities of local government, farmers were also asked if they knew their local councillors and, if so, did they ever meet them to discuss matters of local politics. They were also asked to assess the accessibility of the local town hall and the head of the village council. The results of the questionnaires carried out in 1992 and 2000 clearly show that farmers know their local councillors well. In 2000, 89% of farmers said that they knew their local councillors (in 1992 90% of farmers stated that they knew their councillors). Far fewer farmers stated that they discussed political matters with their councillors and this proportion did not change significantly over the research period. In 1992 45% of respondents stated that they discussed such matters with their local councillors and 48% of respondents in 2000.

One third of the respondents were of the opinion that their local councillors represent the interests of their village as best as they can (in 1992, 40% of the respondents were of this opinion). 20% of the respondents stated that their local councillors do not represent the interests of the village to the best of their ability (in 1992 – 18%). 45% of the respondents were not able to give such an assessment (37% in 1992). Hence, a slight increase can be observed in the proportion of farmers expressing a negative opinion (or not being able to express an opinion) on the activities of local councillors. The proportion of respondents who were satisfied with the activities of local councillors fell accordingly.

On the other hand the accessibility of the town hall and the head of the village council to farmers was positively assessed. The results of surveys carried out in 1992 and 2000 were very similar. In 2000 75% of those questioned stated that the accessibility of the town hall was good, 21% of the respondents gave a neutral assessment and 1% gave a negative assessment. In relation to the accessibility of the head of the village council, 87% of the respondents gave a positive assessment and 10% gave a neutral assessment. No negative assessments were given.

The research indicated that in 2000, 59% of farmers knew what elements made up the municipal budget. In 1992 this proportion was 74%. Only 9% of those questioned agreed with the range of projects on which their local municipality spent its budget and the structure of this expenditure. 20% of those questioned categorically disagreed with the way in which the municipality spent its budget and 51% answered that they did not completely agree with the way in which the municipality spent its budget. This indicates that farmers had become significantly more critical in comparison with 1992. At that time only 11% of the respondents categorically disagreed with the way in which their municipality spent its budget and 34% of them accepted the way in which their municipality spent its budget.

The results of the research showed that, although self-government organisations underwent a crisis at the beginning of the transformation period (which can be seen when considering the data from 1991), farmers see the need for self-government organisations. Since then the membership of the majority of self-government organisations has grown. It should be also noticed that although farmers were in general critical of self-government organisations, one may also notice an association between a farmer's assessment of such organisations and his productivity. Farmers, who had low productivity, farming on small farms with little use of technology and thus obtaining a low income, assessed self-government organisations more harshly. Therefore, there exists a need for farmers themselves to become involved in the activities of such organisations.

The assessment of the efficiency of the actions of self-government in the field of training and education has improved of the period of research. This is particularly important, since this field was indicated as being crucial and at that time farmers were sceptical regarding the fulfilment of the role of self-government organisations in the field.

Based on the results of the research, one may also conclude that self-government organisations are slowly, but steadily, adapting to the conditions of the new market economy. In 1992 the membership of self-government organisations increased. This allows us to be reasonably

optimistic that self-government organisations will become more active and farmers themselves will become more active within the framework of these organisations.

The research also confirmed that farmers were conscious of the need for co-operation between self-government organisations and local government and are also open to such forms of co-operation. Farmers clearly state the importance of various functions realised by self-government organisations. At the same time farmers treat these organisations as a means for achieving their own goals.

Summarising, it can be stated that the research carried out in the Opole region indicates that self-government organisations functioning in rural areas are an important form of the activities of rural people. In addition, if farmers began to see such organisations as institutions that really represented their interests in which they could have an influence, then this would lead to an increase in the effectiveness of the activities of rural self-government organisations. This will certainly be a long process, however its influence on the effectiveness of such organisations will be noticeable. This becomes even more important when we consider that the regional policy of the EU is based on directing support to projects undertaken in a given member state. The financing of activities aimed at realising the goals of the EU's regional policy are carried out using subsidies and investment credit. The following are some of the priorities of self-government organisations in this field: accelerating the modernisation of agriculture and its adaptation to the agricultural structure of the EU, as well as providing help in the development and transformation of rural areas. It is necessary to prepare rural Poland for participation in the procedures used to obtain benefits from integration with the EU as quickly as possible.

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LAND MANAGEMENT AS AN ASPECT OF THE TRANSFORMATION OF FARMING IN THE EUROPEAN COUNTRYSIDE

1. Introduction

In recent years, due to the action of market mechanisms, processes leading to the formation of a sub-sector of economically powerful farms producing food for the needs of the market have become visible. This has led to discussions in the sociological and economic literature, which has split the participants into two groups. In the first group, which will be referred to as the *commercial farm* group, stress is laid upon the effective use of land. This group argues that such powerful farms should be a crucial factor in state policy, as well as in regions where agriculture is an important factor in developing the local economy. The development of agriculture should be accompanied by multifunctional development, which should be used to provide employment for agricultural workers who are at present being laid off. Such multifunctional development should be based on bringing various production and service enterprises to rural areas. According to the proponents of such a view, the ecological nature of agricultural production in Poland is a myth. Unlike in Scandinavian countries, Liechtenstein and Austria, organic farms will make up a negligible proportion of the total number of farms.

The second group, which will be referred to as the *socio-ecological* group [See Urban, 2001; Kaleta, 2001] argue that the traditional, family nature of farms in Poland should be protected as much as possible. According to this view, the number of small, traditional farms should be maintained. This may be achieved by the implementation of programmes supporting the development of organic farming. The work